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ALAS, POOR YORICK!

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"A Pale Man, with Spider Legs,
Clad in Black."

After a Watercolor Portrait of Laurence Sterne by Carmontelle
in the Biography by Wilbur L. Cross

"No more than these three words of inscription, serving both for his epitaph and elegy." — TRISTRAM SHANDY

ALAS, POOR YORICK!

Being Three Hitherto Unrecorded Adventures in the Life of the Reverend Laurence Sterne, A.B., Vicar of Coxwold in Yorkshire, etc., etc., Author of the Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gent.

BY

ALFRED H. BILL

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TO

MY WIFE

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THE COXWOLD COMEDY

"Beauty without innocence or without wit — one or the other — had no attractions for Yorick."

CROSS: *Life and Times of Laurence Sterne.*

THE COXWOLD COMEDY

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PROLOGUE

THE BENIGHTED PRELATE

"A heroine in a hack post-chaise is such a blow upon sentiment as no attempt at grandeur or pathos can withstand."

Northanger Abbey.

"But to marry the girl!" my lord Bishop of Sodor and Man exclaimed peevishly. "Most young men of rank and fortune sow their wild oats, as you so needlessly remind me, but marriage — marriage with a concert singer! The boy is an even greater ass than I took him for." And the bishop flung his great bulk against the cushions of the chaise and gloomed at the streaming windows, too much annoyed to care what his chaplain might think of a sentiment so worldly.

The Reverend Nicodemus Prorkley, however, a little, slight man, who rode on the front seat with his back to the horses, knew how to make allowances for his spiritual master. His own fatigue helped him to do so. Since noon the spattered chaise had been toiling southward over abominable roads. Rushyford, Darlington, Northallerton, looming in turn through the blur of the universal downpour, had marked the stages of their progress from Durham. Soon after they left Thirsk behind them, the storm

clouds had brought darkness in spite of the long twilight proper to the season; and York, which meant supper and beds, must still be little less than twenty miles away. It would have been trying enough to have to travel at all in such weather, but to be driven on by the exigency of an errand for so exacting and powerful a personage as the dowager Lady Montacute —

"If only I had not chanced to mention to her ladyship that I intended to go to London," the bishop had sighed that morning, as he viewed the storm from the window of his comfortable room at the Rose and Crown.

But he had mentioned it, and that same evening had come the letter from her ladyship's London agent with the devastating rumor that her son, Captain Lord Montacute of the Grays, intended to marry a certain Miss Fourmantelle, a concert singer of great beauty, who had lately come to town from York.

Now, of course, a bishop, being one of the lords spiritual, has to run errands for nobody, except possibly the sovereign; but rare and happy is the diocese in which some titled Dorcas does not hold up the bishop's hands for the consideration of occasionally directing their motions; and among the still rarer prelates who can resist the specious temptations of such an arrangement my lord Bishop of Sodor and Man was not numbered. Moreover, in spite of his complaints, he had a personal or at least an official motive in trying to prevent the mésalliance of so important a local magnate as young Lord Montacute.

To have my lady dowager relegated to the position of dowager indeed, and by such a person as the agent's letter named, would be little less than a calamity.

Had he been more alert, still another circumstance would have added to his anxiety. Since darkness fell, the chaise had been creaking and straining over a monstrous number of great hills, although the main road follows the York valley from Darlington southward. But of this both he and his chaplain, having fallen into an uneasy doze after the bishop's outburst, remained unconscious until, near the bottom of a long descent of singular steepness, the weary off horse blundered and went down, his iron hoofs streaking the darkness with a shower of sparks from the flinty ledges.

If a highwayman had clapped a pistol to the postboy's head the chaise could not have stopped with a lurch more tremendous. Such was the bulk of the bishop, however, that he only slid forward a little on the thick leather cushions without even awaking from his nap. But his lordship's chaplain had his head snapped back against the fore-glass and was then hurled headforemost by the recoil of the vehicle into his master's capacious abdomen.

"Highwaymen!" he yelled as he hurtled through the air; and "Highwaymen!" was the word formed by the lips of the drowsy bishop and vocalized by the wind driven out of him by the impact of the chaplain's head.

"Get out, Prorkley," he commanded, forcibly replacing his spiritual aide-de-camp on the front

seat. "Get out and give the rogues what you happen to have about you. But stay! First hand me that wallet."

"But, my lord —"

The little chaplain's quaking was audible above the drum of the rain on the top of the chaise. The bishop rubbed away the mist with his fine cambric handkerchief and peered through the fore-glass. No gentlemen-of-the-road were to be seen, but the feeble illumination of the carriage lamps revealed a prospect the reverse of encouraging. In a wreck of harness the dappled hind-quarters of the fallen horse jerked weakly among trickling ledges that jutted from a sloping stream of mud; the leather breeches of the postboy in the act of dismounting caught the light slimily.

"That horse is done for. You can bear me out, Prorkley, that I warned the postmaster he was never fit for the road," remarked the bishop. He opened the door of the chaise and shouted to the postboy: —

"Ho, there, fellow! Get that horse up and be on with you, sharply. Answer me, sirrah! Are you deaf?" he demanded as, receiving no reply, he began to squeeze his great body through the door.

"My lord — Your lordship will be murdered," cried the chaplain in an agony of terror.

"There are no highwaymen here, Prorkley." The bishop let his feet drop into the fluid mud and advanced upon the postilion. "Get that horse up, and be on with you, you knave!" he shouted, seizing him by the collar.

The postboy lowered the lamp which he had taken from its bracket on the chaise and by the light of which he had been staring at the fallen animal, and turned his dull eyes upon his captor.

"'T is the mercy of God, sir — that is, your lordship," he remarked in awe-struck tones. "'T is the mercy of God 't was not the other horse that fell — and broke my neck."

"Indeed?" queried the bishop drily. "Get the animal up and be on with you."

"Can't be done alone, sir," the postboy returned sullenly. "And help at this here hour —"

"Prorkley," called the bishop, "Prorkley! Where are you, man? Are you asleep?" He thrust his head inside the chaise, felt along the front seat and sounded the soft recesses of the rear, in vain. The vehicle was empty. Then he lifted up a voice trained to fill the void of the largest cathedrals in England.

"PRORKLEY!"

"Coming, my lord, coming," answered the weak notes of the chaplain from up the hill, and half a minute later he emerged from the darkness, voluble with excitement. "Noting that we were in a village, my lord, I was seeking help, when, some three hundred paces back —"

"Sit on this animal's head while the postboy unharnesses him," the bishop cut him short.

"But some three hundred paces back, my lord —"

"Sit on the animal's head, sir."

"Will he not bite me?" quavered the chaplain,

recoiling. "Oh, my lord, I fear the harness is past mending in any event."

"I am waiting, Prorkley. Put the horse-blanket under you if you are afraid of his teeth." The bishop withdrew to the door of the carriage and waited grimly.

It was a July night in the North Riding of Yorkshire in the year 1760, but the exact location was no more to be discovered from the surroundings than the season was to be guessed at by the weather. Driven by a chill northeast wind, the slanting rain swept the village street. The blackness of Erebus was overhead. Only between the hilltop and the lower edge of the flying cloud-wrack the chimneys of the houses and the Norman tower of a church showed against an intervening belt of stars.

"Where are we?" asked the bishop, while Mr. Prorkley was adjusting the horse-blanket about himself, skirt-fashion. The postboy, who had been watching the chaplain's performance with evident enjoyment, strove to replace that expression with one of proper concern.

"I could n't rightly say — that is, your lordship."

"You could n't rightly say, sirrah?" thundered the bishop.

"Not rightly, your lordship. At setting out, you remember, I told your lordship that I was better acquainted to the north. I know we passed through Thirsk, sir. At least I 'm certain 't was Thirsk. But there was a forks after that, and, if I remember

rightly, I turned to the left, sir, when I ought to have taken the right-hand road for York."

"And if you remember rightly, fellow," asked the bishop with heavy irony, "what wretched hamlet is this?"

"This would be Coxwold, your lordship. For surely we 've not come so far as Stillington — we 're but just out of the Hambletons. Now, sir, if you 're ready, sir," he cautioned the chaplain. For, like most of us in misfortune, he had grown quite cheerful at the sight of another more unfortunate still. "Firm-like, sir — and — easy does it."

But the chaplain, agitated by fear and desperation, let himself down hard and suddenly, and not upon the upper part of the horse's head at all but upon its very nose, to the animal's fright and pain. There was a snort, a lunge, a maelstrom of lashing hoofs, a shriek from the chaplain, and from the post-boy, whose brains narrowly missed kicking out, the whole pent-up flood of profanity which had been rising since the misadventure began. The bishop, leaping forward in real alarm for his chaplain's safety, found him locked fast in the most helpless of human attitudes in the teeth of the fallen horse.

"Has he got you by the clothes or by the — by the — person?" cried the bishop, the resources of a large vocabulary failing at the impropriety of the predicament, as he caught the unhappy man by the wrists. "Stop screaming and tell me."

"By the breeches only, I think. But the blanket is so much hay to him. Be quick, be quick, my lord.

He 's shifting his hold. I can feel his lips moving. I implore your lordship!"

"If 't is but by the clothes," grunted the bishop, with a mighty heave. There came the buzz of ripping cloth, and bishop and chaplain rolled over one another in the mud, while the windy street reëchoed to a peal of shrill, unbridled laughter.

"Who laughed?" raged the Bishop of Sodor and Man, brushing the slight weight of the rescued chaplain from his body and springing to his feet, red with most unepiscopal mortification and most unchristian wrath. "Who laughed?"

He might better have demanded who was laughing, for the house-fronts cackled and crowed with gust on gust of uninterrupted mirth. He whirled on the postboy. But he, doubled across the off front wheel, heaved with silent paroxysms only. Beyond him, however, the farthest beams of the lamp shone on a domed white forehead over sparkling eyes and drew with preternatural depth and sharpness a maze of concentric wrinkles about the flashing teeth of a mouth distended in throes of laughter. The whole gave an effect so weird as to have daunted one less fully dedicated to the things of the other world — or less angry — than the bishop.

"You, sir," he shouted. "What do you mean by laughing at the misfortunes of benighted travelers? Come here and lend a hand."

But with a last grimace, a final cachinnation, the apparition vanished, and on the wind the pad of running feet died swiftly away.

"Come back, sir! Come back, you knave!" shouted the bishop. He leaped in pursuit. Grossly fat though he was, he had kept the faculty of brief, swift movement; but Prorkley clung to his arm.

"Remember the dignity of your lordship's exalted station," the chaplain remonstrated. "Permit me to remind your lordship that laughter breaks no bones."

"Does it not? I would have tested that," returned the bishop grimly, nevertheless permitting himself to be led back into the circle of the lantern light.

The postboy lifted himself from the wheel on which laughter might be said to have broken him, and wiped his eyes with the back of his hand.

"Very sorry, my lord," he announced between fingers that held upon his lips the guffaw of reminiscent mirth, "but on top of the harness being quite done, two straps is gone on the chaise's self, sir."

"So we could not go on in any event?" the bishop asked with forced equanimity.

"Not without repairs, my lord, which is sure to be out of the question in a hole like this here, begging your lordship's pardon."

The bishop retreated to the door of the chaise and waved his hand at the blank house-fronts with a great man's indifference to any difficulties which the execution of his orders might involve.

"Prorkley, rouse some of these good people and see if you cannot obtain what is required."

"But, my lord —" The chaplain made an eloquent gesture.

"Ah, quite true! You will do well to be careful how you turn your back," advised his superior coldly.

"My lord," cried Mr. Prorkley, "in the excitement I had forgot. There is a post chaise and pair drawn up in a lane just beyond the church. I had but spied it when your lordship called me back."

"A post chaise and pair!" thundered the bishop. "Why did n't you say so?"

"I tried to, your lordship. Your lordship will remember that just before —"

"Go back at once and see if it can be had. Tell whomsoever controls it that the Bishop of Sodor and Man has need of it, on pressing business of state, and will pay — in reason, Prorkley — will pay."

"Oh, my lord!" cried the chaplain, clapping both hands behind him in an agony of embarrassment at the bare thought. "My lord, there was a lady in the chaise."

"A lady in a hack post chaise?"

"At least I took her for a lady, my lord. She was dressed fine enough, I could see, for she had a traveling lamp hung up inside and was reading a book. But, as your lordship suggests, she may well be some flaunting hussy, for she seemed to be laughing at what she read."

"Female, sir, would be the better word in the circumstances," the bishop admonished. "But come. I will see this — female. Follow me, Prorkley. You will naturally keep behind me in advancing. Should we have to turn away, I will pardon your going before."

"The gentleman might put his head through this here," suggested the postboy, displaying the hole which the horse had bitten in the blanket.

"A very decent and sensible expedient. Prorkley, put it on," ordered the bishop.

He strode away into the darkness, and Mr. Prorkley, his small head and mild features above, his slender shanks twinkling below the uncouth drapery, followed, a sight to move the laughter of gods and postboys.

For a good while there seemed likely to be no other audience. There was no chaise in the lane, and the bishop made free to doubt there having been one, though the chaplain, harrowed by his master's reflections on his powers of observation, insisted that he could feel in the mud deep wheel-tracks where it had stood half an hour ago. Certainly there was no trace of it in any other lane; they explored every one of the few between them and the chaise. Nor could they espy a glimmer of light in any of the houses until, just as they neared the end of their return journey, a faint gleam lighted a side window.

This unfortunately proved to belong to a village cobbler, kept awake by toothache, and a professing atheist into the bargain, it turned out. For, as soon as he was made to understand the rank and condition of the exalted personage interrogating him, he slammed down his window, and only Prorkley's intercessions on the basis of their common manhood persuaded him to open it again for just the time required to direct them, with some profane embellish-

ments, to the vicarage. Let them go there by all means, and make a crows' conventicle of it, he urged. The parson would still be out of bed: he sat up till all hours, scribbling.

The vicarage, it appeared, stood near the top of the hill from the ascent and descent of which the bishop was still somewhat short of breath. As once again he toiled up the trickling slope, he had ample time to reconsider the causes to which he owed this miserable predicament. Had his laboring lungs permitted, his comments upon the attachment of young Lord Montacute for the concert singer of York might have been even less trammeled by convention and piety than they had been a few hours before.

ACT I

A CRIMSON-LINED CLOAK

"The bee, the spider, the marked down victim, the destined prey?"

Man and Superman.

COXWOLD vicarage was an irregular, rambling house of many gables, that looked bigger than it was because of its own sprawling outlines, the meaner dimensions of its neighbors, and especially on account of the huge, misshapen chimney that buttressed its eastern and lower end. No light shone from any of its windows, but behind thick curtains the room from which the chimney loomed to lose itself in the rainy dark glowed with the combined illumination of candles and a wood fire.

An ink-spattered table stood between the window and the hearth, and about a quarter of an hour before the chaise of my lord Bishop of Sodor and Man splashed downhill to its imminent catastrophe, the vicar of Coxwold sat before it, gnawing the feather of a pen that tasted of disillusionment. Fame had but lately crowned his brows; fortune in the shape of a delighted publisher had stuffed his pockets with money and the promise of so much more to come that he had called himself the richest man in Europe. Hardly a month had passed since the most jealously

guarded doors in London were swinging open to him as an honored guest. Lyttleton and Chesterfield had cultivated his acquaintance; the Right Honorable Mr. Pitt had accepted the dedication of his second edition, for which Hogarth himself had drawn the frontispiece; Garrick had given him the freedom of both his playhouses; and Lord Bathurst, the intimate of Pope and Swift, had sought him out at Carleton House with the delicate implication that in the novel of the country parson from the North he had found their equal.

The vicar reminded himself that the sudden change from this glory to the quiet and routine of a rural parish was more than enough to account for his depression. To be sure, he had lingered at York for three weeks after his return, fearing just such an eventuality. There, however, in outward and visible sign of his fame, the postboy had met him on the Sutton road and delivered to him a letter to which some London wits, on a bet, had given no other address than "Tristram Shandy, Europe."

But no. His troubles lay deeper than any mood; and it did not help him greatly at this moment to realize that they were the penalties of fame. In countless ways it was being driven in upon him that it is a serious matter for a clergyman to be hailed as the author of the most successful, the cleverest, the wittiest — and many, alas! said the most improper — book which had appeared in England in a decade. In the very praise which he had received from such of his superiors in the Church as had not condemned

poor *Tristram* out of hand he had been compelled to read an implied reproof and a veiled warning for the future. The record of his private life had been raided to furnish material for hireling scribblers, and the misguided zeal of foolish friends had vied with the malice of enemies to give him that notoriety which is the antithesis of reputation. Let these do a little more, and between them and his book his ecclesiastical career might well be done to death.

While the eaves dripped and the sticks on the hearth sputtered and hissed, he experienced that ebb tide of the spirit, so terrible to sanguine temperaments such as his. He saw falsehood triumphant; and those distorted versions of all in his life of which he was least proud displayed themselves before him with the look of authenticity. At last outraged self-respect took arms in its own defense. If he had wasted his wife's fortune in speculation, had he not now put himself in the way of restoring it sevenfold? Had it not been his uncle's foul stroke which made their quarrel an open shame to both of them? As for his wife and the gossip which he had wrought to the verge of scandal during her strange illness, had he not treated her with unfailing kindness, kept her under the care of a lunatic doctor in comfortable lodgings at York, and humored her delusions — she had fancied herself Queen of Bohemia — at bitter cost to his leisure, his work, and his purse? Had he not returned to her as soon as she had recovered? In the meanwhile, had he not been entitled to some slight diversion?

The partner of his diversions — It was characteristic of the man that at this point in his musings the fact of his being well out of the entanglement meant less to him than the doubt of his having extricated himself becomingly. The best medical opinion in York had assured him that his wife's chances of recovery were almost nil, that her early death was to be looked for. The girl had known as well as he did that there could be nothing more than a pleasant flirtation between them as long as his wife lived. Was it his fault that she had had no better sense than to follow him to London simply because he had been so foolish as to write, suggesting that she should come? Well, she must have realized by this time that, although York, knowing them both, might tolerate an affair between the beautiful singer of the Assembly Rooms and the witty prebendary of the Cathedral, such intimacy could not fail to compromise both their reputations in the raw glare of his sudden celebrity in the metropolis. Her silence, now of several weeks' duration, showed that she had. The pity was that he had not realized it before he wrote to suggest her coming. Would he never cease to do such things, to be so carried away by the one delightful phase of an idea that the whisper of discretion was unheard until too late?

This time, fortunately, he had heard it soon enough to save their reputations. And a good thing, too! But their friendship and her pride, he greatly feared, had paid the cost. That last letter he had written her — she had never answered it.

It had required no answer — and yet — His hand went out to the stained and battered letter-book among the loose sheets that strewed the table, drew back, hesitated, finally took it up and opened it. Here was the copy. Now we should see!

Dear Kitty — if it would have saved my life I have not had one hour or one half hour in my power since I saw you on Sunday [ran the blotted lines], else my dear Kitty may be sure that I should not have been thus absent. Every minute of this day and to-morrow is pre-engaged, and I am as much a prisoner as if I was in Jayl. I beg, dear girl, you will believe I do not spend an hour where I wish, for I wish to be with you always; but fate orders my steps, God knows how for the present. Adieu! Adieu!

Could anything be kinder, more sincere — and a more perfect specimen of the sort of letter a gentleman would write to a woman of whom he had begun to weary? Conscience, sharpened by his sense of literary values, made the addendum. He had never found that free hour in which to see her; and before many days had passed came the news of his wife's recovery. True, he had not left her in difficulties, abandoned her, as the phrase goes. Garrick himself was an old friend of hers; professional engagements had immediately become numerous; already she had a circle of her own which, if it was not of the great world where he went, but only on its musical and theatrical fringes, included a half dozen of the most fashionable young men about town, who sea-

soned a patronage of the arts with admiration of the more beautiful of the artists; and his own devoted admiration had never blinded his keen insight to the fact that she was perfectly able to take care of herself. But, artist in living as in all else, it irked him that so sweet a friendship should thus die away in bathetic silence.

Impulsively he dragged a sheet of paper before him, stabbed thrice at the inkhorn before his pen hit it, wrote rapidly for half a page, dropped his pen to stare at the ceiling. Then he read over what he had written and shook his head. What was the neat way the French put their proverb about a man accusing himself when he excused himself? He must n't make that mistake. To get a fresh look at what he had done, he turned the paper over, noted the place where the address should be when it was folded and sealed, and wrote with unusual care: —

For Miss Catherine Fourmantelle,
Meard's Court, Soho, London.

But he fared no better when he turned back to the other side, though he sat staring at it with a concentration so intense that the bishop's chaise rolled past his window without causing him to raise his eyes. It was in the hope that a breath of fresh air might quicken his invention that he sprang to his feet a few minutes later and, without stopping for hat or great-coat, hurried out into the rainy night.

He was back in ten minutes, opening the front door noiselessly and pausing in the narrow hallway to

listen to the silence of the house. Then a chuckle of amusement that ended in a coughing fit left him gasping, with one slender hand held hard against his narrow chest. As he stood thus, his appearance presented a singular assemblage of contradictions. To his middling height his slim, not very well nourished figure gave a look of fragile loftiness. His dress combined the dandy and the sloven. Black silk stockings, slippers of figured yellow silk, and the frayed skirts of a scant quilted dressing-gown of the same material and design were grey with the mud of his recent excursion, while over gown and slippers ran a random pattern of ink in blots and splotches. Under the mass of stringy dough into which the rain had turned a powdered wig of the latest London mode, his face, contorted by the paroxysm that racked him, showed every line which seven-and-forty years of tingling life had stamped upon it, yet the very dejection of pendent lip and sombre eye told of a persistence of youth unseasoned by either experience or philosophy, and made plausible the identification of the tormented countenance with the one which had leered so uncannily upon the misadventure of the Bishop of Sodor and Man a few minutes before. The flash of laughter as he drew his first free breath confirmed it. He flung himself into the cane-seated chair before the table and, catching up his pen, wrote rapidly: —

Dear, dear Kitty — Could you but have seen them — But, no — 'T is weeks since I saw you and — shame to me — I have not written you a line since. Only, writing

here just now alone in the silence of the night — my wife and daughter in bed and asleep hours ago — and being come to the end of my dexterity, out I plunged into the storm, as is my wont to do for the clearing of my brains, when what should I come upon but —

The pen halted so suddenly that the ink spurted from its nib. Not a sound had broken in upon its busy scratching, but against the cheek of the vicar had been laid a hand, soft, smooth, unmistakably feminine. The dark eyes beneath his high, white forehead narrowed from amazement to swift cunning, then lighted with a half-humorous, half-despairing resignation, as he lifted the fingers which had spread themselves over his page to the hand that caressed his cheek. Whoever was behind him must already have had ample opportunity to read over his shoulder.

"Dearest Elizabeth," said he, without turning his head, as the woman's hand nestled within his, "how you startled me! Engrossed with *Tristram* as I was — Or is it Lyd? You ought not to leave your warm bed on a night like this, child," he broke off. But still, in evident enjoyment of his uncertainty, he made no effort to discover who his charming disturber might be.

"'Dear, dear Kitty!'" exclaimed the voice behind him in tones obviously disguised, but with mingled anger and amusement ringing in them. "I have just been reading the *Life of Mr. Tristram Shandy* for the second time, but I found no dear, dear Kitty in its pages."

Pleasure, doubt, annoyance, and anxiety flitted in

turn across the vicar's face. He drew downward the hand he had continued to hold and, taking it in both his own, examined it deliberately.

"'T is the hand of Kitty Fourmantelle," he cried, and sprang up, pressing it to his lips. "Dear child, I thought you were still in town. You have seen that I was thinking of you, dear Kitty."

The lady beheld him, unsmiling. Her laughter conquered, her anger glowed in a pair of stormy eyes. She seemed to be about twenty-four years old, a tall, beautiful woman, but dressed with a conformity to the mode rather too exact, since the quality of her gown hardly matched the elegance of its fashion. Her large dark eyes made a startling contrast with her white skin and the masses of golden hair which crowned her small head and which, in defiance of custom, bore no trace of powder. These things combined with a studied effect in gesture and attitude to give more than a suggestion of the actress or the professional singer; and when she spoke again it was in a voice sweet, controlled, and modulated by training.

"Laurence — Or must I begin to pay homage like the rest of the world and call you Yorick?"

"What you will, dear Kitty." He gently lowered her hand and let it go. "What you will," he repeated, closing the door softly and drawing a large easy-chair to the fireside. "But while those lovely eyes consume me with their unwonted fires I must beg Miss Fourmantelle to grace this chair."

"And I must beg Mr. Sterne's indulgence while I rest a body sadly wearied by posting from — from

London, Laurence," she sobbed, collapsing into the chair and hiding her eyes in a lace handkerchief.

For an instant Sterne hovered over her as if he would have taken her in his arms.

"Kitty," he cried in deep concern. "My poor child!" But he retreated to the chair at the writing-table and stood behind it. "Old Discretion!" he exclaimed, gripping the two knobs in which the top of its back terminated, as if he drew from them strength for his resolution. "Old Wit! So I name these ugly protuberances, my dear. Wit and Discretion, they whisper in my two ears as I write, while this room fills with thronging imps. But never had poor Yorick such need of these sage counselors as now, with the nymph of York Assembly Rooms his guest."

Over her handkerchief Miss Fourmantelle's eyes shone up at him, wondrous soft in the firelight.

"That 's beautiful, Laurence. Can't you work it into the new *Shandy?*" she asked, with a subtle blending of flattery for both the artist and the man.

"'T is but the reflection of your presence, dear Kitty."

"Bring that chair to the other side of the hearth, as you used to do in Stonegate," she directed, sweetly imperious. "Those dear, happy days in Stonegate ere Fame and Fortune —"

"Many things have changed beside Fame and Fortune," he interrupted. Shaking his head, he smiled, but the veins in his hands stood out as he

gripped the chair-back. "In the days which you honor me by calling dear and happy, my wife —"

"I have heard that she was better." There was a thin edge to the tone in which Miss Fourmantelle broke in. "And when you hid my name with your hand just now —"

"She has recovered both her reason and her health," Sterne went on with quiet emphasis, ignoring the significance of her pause. "Unfortunately she retired early to-night or —"

"She would be on hand to see that my visit was a short one, I suspect," Miss Fourmantelle smiled.

"Or — I was about to say — she would add her welcome to mine."

"Oh, I warrant she would," Miss Fourmantelle cried, suddenly slipping over the verge of equanimity. "How she would welcome the miserable singing-woman who tried to steal her husband from her while she was mad! What else can she think of me? 'T is what all York thought, but did n't trouble itself over — a poor concert singer and a fool of a clergyman! A fool, Laurence, a buffoon! 'T is what they still think, only I 'm forgotten, and you 're become a famous, a universal fool." She ended in a burst of weeping.

"I myself have said it," commented Sterne with a grimace. "Why should it wound so deeply when I hear it from another? Old Wit, farewell. Farewell, Discretion, too; for either without the other is worse than useless. Dear, dear Kitty," he exclaimed, going to her and taking in both of his one of the

beautiful hands that hid her face. "Dear child, 't would never have been news to either of us that those happy days in Stonegate were but a lovely dream, that we did but snatch in innocent play at a sweetness the sweeter because never to be possessed."

"Is that why you sent for me to London?" she sobbed behind her handkerchief, her imprisoned hand struggling.

"But in London — in London Mr. Garrick stood ready to do everything for you," he countered feebly.

"So 't was for Mr. Garrick's sake?" She gave him a sudden long look from eyes all moist and starry.

"Kitty, dearest Kitty," he cried, as he caught her other hand and fell on his knees beside her. "Forgive me. At least tell me how I can serve you now. Command me."

"Commands are not for the poor singer to give to the rich and famous Mr. Sterne, to whom she flees for safety and protection. Let the Queen of Bohemia issue her commands — Ah, Laurence, now the poor singer has angered you."

Sterne had dropped her hands and sprung to his feet.

"I think I have already told Miss Fourmantelle," he said with firmness, walking to the other side of the hearth, however, and keeping his eyes fixed upon the floor, "that my wife has recovered from her pitiable hallucinations. She is once more the faithful, loving —"

"Trusting, Laurence?" she shot at him.

"I am unwilling to remind Miss Fourmantelle that I am entertaining her under the same roof with Mrs. Sterne at the present hour of the night and that I have not yet asked her to what circumstances I owe the honor of her visit," he replied.

She rose slowly.

"It needed no more than that — nay, not so much, to rid Mr. Sterne of his poor Fourmantelle. If it was for this that I sat an hour in my chaise, waiting only that I might come in without causing you embarrassment, well, poor Kitty shall trouble you no further," cried she. She caught up a grey mantle from the chair on which she had dropped it and, flinging it about her with widespread arms, stood for an instant enchantingly revealed against the warm crimson of its lining.

"Kitty," he demanded, making a step toward her, "what brings you here?"

"What can it matter to Mr. Sterne, the cause that brings the poor, discarded singer to his door?" The grey folds were wrapped around her now, and under the hood of the mantle her face was half revealed, half hidden by charming shadows.

Sterne balanced on one foot. Then he turned, walked to the fireplace, and faced her gravely, one arm extended along the stone shelf.

"Poor child," he said, "you must be in real trouble to leave your gay world of Montacutes and Talbots — Oh, never start because I have heard of your triumphs — to seek out a rickety old country parson like me! What is it? Does some ardent young cap-

tain of horse, aflame with the fires you have kindled, pursue — poor devil! — your matchless sweetness?"

He eyed her sharply. She had started at the name of either Montacute or Talbot, — it was impossible to say which, — and if the firelight did not deceive him, her face was glowing beneath the shadow of the hood. But her eyes remained fixed upon the floor, and in a moment he turned and began to peer behind the books on the shelf.

"You must be weary, too weary to speak now. Sit here," he suggested. With the light swiftness which was part of all he did, he drew up the easy-chair to the table, and produced a bottle and two dusty glasses from behind the books. "Something, thank Heaven, remains of the old days, though it be but a bottle of Hall-Stevenson's Calcavillo. Neither Talbot nor Montacute could better that, however," he added, drawing his own chair up beside the easy one.

Miss Fourmantelle advanced to the table and stood beside it, her forearms gleaming in the candle-light as she hesitated over the fastenings of her cloak. Sterne rested his elbows on the back of his chair and smiled up at her.

"Which was it? Which is it to be?" he teased. "I placed my wager on my lord, Captain of the Grays, in May. But Berenger thought —"

"Don't — don't mention his name!" she burst out with passionate voice and gesture. "Don't let me hear it!"

"His name? Whose? Montacute's? Talbot's?

Great Heaven, not Berenger's? Not Dick's, all chivalry and blank verse? Answer me. Look at me."

Miss Fourmantelle raised her eyes for an instant ere she hid them in her handkerchief; but not till morning did it occur to Sterne that they were not exactly the eyes of a hunted doe.

"Oh, Laurence, Laurence, why did you bring me into the sight of that relentless man?" she sobbed from her ambuscade.

"Berenger pursues you? Impossible!"

"His chaise must already be this side of York."

"And you have fled to me? But surely your mother — She is still at York, is she not?"

"York, Laurie? Where every soul from Micklegate to the Minster knows that I left York to follow you to London?"

"Do they, indeed? After all, I should be the last to hear that they did," he commented drily. "But come; refreshment first, then plans."

He stepped behind her, drawing the hood from her shining hair and holding out his hands on either side of her shoulders to take the edges of her cloak as she released them. It was not a prudent thing for him to do, but prudence was ever the least of his virtues. Besides, preoccupied by schemes for her future, he may have forgotten the danger of her beauty.

"Your sister in France!" he exclaimed. "She is rich, you have told me."

"Take me to her," she cried, turning in the semicircle of his outstretched arms and catching his

hands in hers, while the cloak dropped unheeded to the floor between them.

"Your mother shall take you," he assured her.

"Two helpless women to cross the sea in wartime?" she asked, drawing him toward her.

"It can be managed quite safely by way of the Low Countries." He spoke with a desperate matter-of-factness.

"But if my mother will not — dare not?" Her warm arm slid about his neck.

A peremptory knocking at the front door made them spring apart.

"'T is he," she cried. "Hide me, for God's sake!"

Sterne leaped to the door of the room, flung it open, and motioned down the passage.

"Which way?" she whispered. "Oh, that I had bolted that door when I came in!"

"To the left."

Another volley of knocking rattled on the panels.

"No, no," he called softly after her. "To the left. My wife —"

The latch clicked behind him as he ran to guide her; into his mind flashed the thought of the benighted prelate who might well be wandering about the village. But precarious as was the state of his reputation with his superiors, anything would be better than to have her groping among the dark chambers at the back of the house, where his wife and daughter lay asleep. As he caught her arm and dragged her out of sight, he heard the front door open, feet on the threshold, and felt the chill of the night air swirl about his legs.

ACT II

ANGELS UNAWARES

"You are not ashamed . . . to judge me for my book without having read it."

Man and Superman.

On the threshold, the Bishop of Sodor and Man rubbed his eyes as if to assure himself that they had not deceived him. In the obscurity of the far end of the passage he had just seen a man in a scant yellow dressing-gown drag a handsome woman through a doorway.

"A barbarous land and a barbarous peasantry," he exclaimed. "Doubtless that clown is still laughing at the delicacy of his wit in informing us that this is the vicarage."

"My lord," whispered the chaplain, shaking the raindrops from the horse-blanket which still enveloped him to his shanks, "that was the lady I saw in the post chaise."

"So you still stick to your absurd story? I tell you you were dreaming, man. If the chaise was there, why could we not find it?"

Mr. Prorkley had too much experience of his master to repeat the obvious explanation. With a wave of his hand he indicated the open door on his right.

"I beg to submit, my lord, the semblance of a study to offset the evidence of the passage," he said humbly.

But, as he surveyed the interior of the lighted room, the bishop shook his head. The cloak, a tumbled mass of crimson on the floor, the wine bottle and the two full glasses on the inky table, the intimate juxtaposition of the chairs, fairly screamed of scandal when taken with the scene which had outraged his vision a minute before. He had the impulse to stalk out of that house of wickedness forthwith; the lesson would have been invaluable to Prorkley, for the little chaplain's eyes were sparkling with salacious curiosity. But the alternative was the rain-swept street, and his greatcoat was all but soaked through, his fat legs drenched, by long exposure to the storm.

"Another stick on the fire, Prorkley," he commanded, exercising that freedom with mundane property not his own which is characteristic of many high ecclesiastics and is doubtless owing to their low opinion of the things of this world. Mr. Prorkley obeyed. Then, quite properly deferring his own comfort to that of his master, he strolled to the writing-table and glanced at the uppermost of the papers which Sterne had swept together at one side. Comfortably steaming before the fire, the bishop examined the titles of the books on the stone shelf above it.

"Locke on *Human Understanding*," he read aloud. "Hum! *Anatomy of Melancholy*, hum, hum. *Textus*

Roffensis —" His hand was hovering over the volume when his eye was caught by the title of the next.

"Rabelais." He took it down at once. "Ozell's translation. Prorkley. I say, Prorkley, what are you doing there?"

"Yes, my lord. Certainly, your lordship, certainly." The chaplain tore his eyes away from the sheet of manuscript on which they were riveted. "Yes, my lord?"

"Prorkley, was it not to Rabelais that my lord Bishop of Gloucester likened this lewd fellow Sterne, whose book is debauching the taste and morals of all Britain?"

"It was, my lord, but —" The chaplain's eyes were on the manuscript again; he left his sentence unfinished. "Tee-hee-hee-hee," he cackled.

"Prorkley!" thundered the bishop, slamming his book and glaring.

"Oh, my lord, I beg your lordship's pardon, I 'm sure; but 't is the strangest coincidence. We are in the house of the man himself, and this that I am reading is his volume third, though I had understood that his living was at Sutton-on-the-Forest," babbled the little clergyman.

"The man himself? His volume third?" echoed the bishop. "Your fright at the horse must have addled your brains."

"'T is the Reverend Mr. Sterne, I mean, my lord. And this appears to be part of the new volume of his *Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gent.*, which,

as your lordship said but now, Bishop Warburton commended," Mr. Prorkley made haste to add.

"Ah," hesitated the bishop. "Ah — let me see the latest excrescence of the fellow's pruriency."

The chaplain held out his hand to relieve him of the Rabelais, but he retreated to the mantel and exchanged the book for another.

"No, Prorkley," he admonished. "'T is as I feared, a mere prostitution of genius to vulgar wit. Here. Take Burton. He will improve your style, and you may easily skip his infrequent lapses into the indecorous."

With the volume in his hand, he turned to find himself in the presence of a gentleman who stood, smiling, on the threshold.

"Gentlemen," — the newcomer bowed with polished courtesy, — "I take it I must thank the infamous weather for such guests."

He wore a black coat of exquisite cut, with lace at throat and wrists. Silver buckles glimmered on his elegant shoes. A fresh wig supplanted the sodden horror of an hour before. In his hands, on a silver salver, he bore a pie of remarkable depth and diameter, over the upper crust of which he smiled his welcome.

For a moment the Bishop of Sodor and Man was ready to believe that a third extraordinary person had been brought into his life by the adventures of the night. But something in the gentleman's smile as he took in the uncouth drapery of the chaplain, a trace or two of brushed mud on the black silk stock-

ings, and a certain lightness of movement and carriage assured him that this benevolent host was none other than the owner of the face which had leered upon the scene of his discomfiture at the bottom of the hill. So he bowed with hardly concealed hostility.

"Parson Yorick, very much at your service, gentlemen," said Sterne, setting down the pie on the table and returning the bishop's rigid inclination with easy grace.

"I have the honor to present, sir," began the chaplain, the skirts of his weird vestment bobbing as he bowed in turn.

"Two poor clergymen, sir," the bishop cut him short, "whom a broken vehicle has thrown upon your hospitality; the Reverend Nicodemus Prorkley of Peel Castle in the Isle of Man, sir — my own name is Hildesley. Your very obliged and humble servants."

"Honored, I 'm sure. Your humble servant, gentlemen. I am reminded of the homely proverb of the ill wind." Under another bow he concealed a start of surprise at sight of the crimson-lined cloak still lying where it had fallen. The indifference was well simulated, however, with which he picked it up and flung it over the back of his chair.

"A pigeon pie," he announced, with a depreciatory gesture toward the table; "a pigeon pie which a most sacrilegious maidservant hath broke ope' — though I think only to the extent of half a pigeon — and a bottle of Calcavillo, or the better part of it,"

he added, filling two fresh glasses. "Chairs, gentlemen, I beg; and a grace from you, sir, if you please." He bowed to the bishop.

"By the bye," he asked, when heads were lifted and knives and forks in action, "am I right, Mr. Hildesley, in assuming that you are related to your diocesan, Mark Hildesley?"

The bishop had raised his glass. So it may have been because the wine tickled his throat that he coughed and could not immediately reply.

"His lordship — that is — No, Mr. Hildesley here is not related to the bishop," Mr. Prorkley supplied for him. "But anybody might think so, as you have done, sir, on account of the identity of the name."

"I believe they might, indeed," Sterne returned with a certain dryness.

Over the rim of his wineglass the bishop signaled his annoyance to his chaplain. On the spur of the moment he had hesitated to have the not altogether decorously celebrated author of *Tristram Shandy* know what angels he was entertaining unawares, but it would be more humiliating still to have him discover that his hospitality was being accepted with such disingenuousness. Mr. Prorkley blushed under the bishop's glance; and Sterne beheld, with a smile that increased the disorder of his guests as cavalry completes the rout produced by guns, the havoc wrought by his apparently innocuous question.

"Your — your valuable papers will be the worse for having food dropped upon them," stammered the chaplain.

"Poor rubbish of my own scribbling," said Sterne airily.

"Not so, I believe, does the world regard the writings of Mr. Yorick." Mr. Prorkley rose to cover his embarrassment with a low bow.

"My dear fellow, — if you will allow me to call you so, my dear sir, — that is handsome of you," cried Sterne, beaming upon him. "But perhaps you are not aware that your bishop has rechristened my poor book by the name of 'Shameless Shandy.'"

"Has your lordship — has he read it?" Mr. Prorkley recalled too late a glance of amazement at his superior.

"That I cannot say," Sterne replied blandly. "But so, I hear, he named it in a letter to Mr. Samuel Richardson."

"His lordship may have accidentally read some few passages, I suppose," put in the bishop, with a very red face. He pushed back his plate and addressed his host with an assumption of blunt frankness: —

"I shall make no effort to do justice to your hospitality, sir, for we are traveling on his lordship's business, — I might almost say on business of state, — and it is of the utmost importance that we reach London posthaste. Our chaise is broken, one of our animals foundered. Can you not, in your position here, find us the means to proceed immediately?"

As he bowed his head in understanding of the gravity of the case, Sterne caught a glimpse of the crimson lining of the cloak, which draped the back of his chair, setting off his sober elegance, and his eyes

lighted with humorous appreciation of the sincerity of his next remark.

"I cannot overstate my desire to be of service to you, gentlemen. But short of an empty chaise, returning to York at this late hour —" His shoulders lifted at the slenderness of the chance.

"There was a chaise, sir," Mr. Prorkley began timidly.

The bishop, leaning forward, with a sudden inspiration, took the words out of his mouth.

"A chaise drawn up in the next lane, sir. A lady was in it, sir." He fixed his host with a glance of bold suspicion; but Sterne met it with a smile.

"And to its disappearance I owe the pleasure of your company? Am I right?"

"It had disappeared after — after our attempt to raise the horse," nodded Prorkley.

"At which time a mannerless lout laughed at our mishap," appended the bishop severely, as Sterne's smile broadened.

"For that I do earnestly beg your pardon," Sterne began. "But —"

"But the lady, sir," exclaimed the bishop in denunciatory tones, thrusting forward his heavy face with a menacing expression, "the lady we have seen under this roof, sir."

"Hush," commanded Sterne; and, as he held up his hand for silence, the click of high-heeled slippers sounded along the passage outside.

"Kitty," he called softly. "Kitty, these gentlemen —"

The door opened and Miss Fourmantelle stood on the threshold. At the effrontery of their host, at the suddenness and beauty of the apparition, the two benighted clergymen sat nonplused and gaping. Sterne on his feet, the words of a ceremonious introduction on his lips, was hardly in better case. For before him, instead of the gracious lady dressed in the latest mode, whom he had looked for, postured the most perfect of singing-chambermaids. A demure cap displayed her shining hair; a dainty apron set off the litheness of her waist; beneath the hem of her crisp skirt delicate ankles flashed in silk; and the handle of a warming-pan relieved the contours of a dimpled forearm.

"Did you call, sir?" she asked, her long lashes sweeping her cheeks. She moved briskly to the chair from which he had risen and threw the crimson-lined cloak over her arm. "Beg pardon, sir, but mistress's cloak — Will I warm the gentlemen's beds, sir?"

Across the table the bishop's large hand grasped Prorkley's arm.

"The same?" he queried in a stage whisper.

"And in the chaise, too," nodded the chaplain.

"The gentlemen, Kitty," said Sterne, too bewildered, now that Miss Fourmantelle had taken so strong a line of her own, to be certain that the policy of frankness which he had intended to follow was after all the best one, "the gentlemen desire above all things to go on their way to York. Could they but find a chaise returning empty —"

"The chaise in which you yourself were seated not an hour ago, ma'am," interrupted the bishop, rising to his majestic height, "would suit us very well."

"I, sir? I in a chaise?" Miss Fourmantelle had faced successfully audiences quite as unsympathetic as the bishop was. "You must intend to laugh at a poor girl, sir. Yet, had I known but a minute ago, sir, I did see a chaise from the window. It was headed north, but nobody in it. I would n't say it was out of the village yet. If master would have me run after it —"

"A chaise, and empty, do you say?" cried the bishop. "Do you hear, Prorkley? Headed north. Bring it to the door."

The blanket of the zealous chaplain streamed behind him like the tail of a comet as he sped from the room.

"I would, sir," said the bishop, fastening his greatcoat, "that I might make a better report of you to His Grace the Archbishop of York than duty will compel me to do."

"Ah, duty is a stern mistress," Sterne acquiesced flippantly, "but as fickle as the rest of them, I 've observed. Do her bidding to-day and she 'll make you pick out your work with your nose to-morrow," he added: an observation to which the bishop deigned not to reply.

"I have the honor to wish you a very good night, sir," said he. But when Miss Fourmantelle, in her character of chambermaid, bobbed him the humblest

of courtesies, he turned on her in a sudden blaze of wrath.

"You have not deceived me, madam," he thundered.

"Nor thou me, thou whited wall," cried Sterne as the front door banged behind his guest. Miss Fourmantelle ran to it and drove home the bolt.

"So I have n't deceived him? Have I not?" she laughed, skipping back into the study. She snatched from her hair the lace handkerchief which formed her cap, tossed the apron into a corner, extracted half a dozen pins from her skirt, and the bright folds fell rustling about her feet once more. She flung herself into the easy-chair. "Am I not actress as well as singer?"

Sterne did not reply. With a sheet of blotted writing in his left hand, he faced the door and, white with anger, shook his fist at it.

"May he be cursed outwardly and inwardly!" he exclaimed, glancing at the paper. "May he be cursed in the hair of his head, in his brains, — if he has any, which I doubt, — in his temples, in his forehead, in his ears, in his eyebrows; in cheeks, jawbones, nostrils; in his fore-teeth and grinders — Oh, confound the pompous, meddling coxcomb!" he broke off, and dropped into his chair, while the paper fluttered to the floor.

"Good gracious, Laurie," cried the singer, "what dreadful-sounding nonsense! Is it out of the new *Shandy?*"

"'T is out of the *Textus Roffensis.* But I mean to steal it. Yes," the author nodded gloomily.

"This is a beautiful kettle of fish," he burst out. "Already every inky Grub Street scribbler was nosing through my past, turning white grey and grey black; my lord Bishop of Gloucester writes me that even he must wash his hands of me if I do not cease to drive in the very sentinels of discretion; and now we have his lordship of Sodor and Man posting to the Archbishop with such a tale as can be fabricated only by the pure in heart. Truly —"

"The Bishop of Sodor and Man? Good Lord, Laurie, I 've locked him out!"

"What of that?" Sterne queried impatiently. "He 's probably on the road to York by this time."

"But there was no chaise," cried Miss Fourmantelle in delighted consternation. "I only said there was to get rid of them. I thought they might as well be sitting in their own broken-down vehicle as making themselves disagreeable here. How was I to know —"

"No chaise? But your own?"

"I sent it on. That 's why they could n't find it."

"Then — then you could n't have left here as you threatened to do a while back!" But his annoyance gave him no leisure to contemplate this discovery. "Why in Heaven's name could n't you appear in your proper person as my wife's guest and mine," he demanded, "instead of that infernal masquerade?"

"Laurence!" Her eyes rested on him for an instant with the look of a stricken deer. "If you were to take me to — You had just promised to take

me — to Paris, Laurie; we had to get rid of them, had n't we?" she sobbed.

"I promised no such thing. I said I would see that your mother took you," he retorted, and, at the sight of her tears, slouched low in his chair, hands thrust into breeches pockets, glooming sulkily at the blotted table-top.

"A fine bit of work we 've made of it! He penetrated your disguise as easily as I pierced his incognito; he saw you in the passage, and I heard his Prorkley call him 'my lord' out there in the mud, to say nothing of that great amethyst on his ring finger — the blockhead, Pharisee and hypocrite, who finds my house too dubious for the acknowledgment of his office, and renames my book, forsooth, having accidentally read some few passages! I could rename him Holy Writ, and in a fashion that would astonish him, having accidentally read some few passages. Let him go to the Archbishop and be hanged to him!" And, undiverted by Miss Fourmantelle's giggle at his savage mimicry of the bishop's ponderous tones, Sterne brought his elbows down upon the table and sunk his face between his hands.

Miss Fourmantelle lowered her handkerchief and sprang up. Whatever lack of sincerity an unimpassioned observer might have felt in much that she had said and done thus far, there was no doubting the pity and contrition with which she now bent over him, caressing his bowed shoulders.

"Laurie, don't let it hurt you so," her rich voice

crooned. "You 've more brains in your little finger than all these bishops in their whole bloated bodies. I was a fool to come here, and unkind, but if I had ever dreamed that my presence could harm you — It cannot be so bad, can it? The Dean still stands your friend. And everybody admires you — and fears you."

Her hands lingered on his sleeve, while in her eyes began to shine a look of decision and content, as if she were about to say something more: something which would put all his troubles to flight. Had he kept silent another moment he would have heard it, but he cried out bitterly: —

"Everybody envies and hates me, or patronizes me as a clown for their sport. Oh, I 'm sick to death of all of it: the lying, the hypocrisy, the sniggering over my book in closets and blushing before the world!" He leaped to his feet. "Come! Let us to France, where men dare appear as they are and write what they please, with nought to fear but a liberal monarch's interdiction!" He caught up the heap of manuscript from the table, bundled it into a roll, and thrust it into his breast. "My own carriage shall take us to Hull. Hall-Stevenson will honor the bills I will draw on him there. Then to France: *à Paris! en avant, ma belle!*" he cried with a sudden, wild gayety, catching her hands in his.

But, unaccountably, she appeared to hesitate.

"Of course, every door would fly open to your genius there." She spoke the words as if she were arguing against herself.

"If they should ever come to hear of it," he laughed. "But we must hurry if we are not to have Sodor and Man and the whole archipelago of the Hebrides endangering our voyage. We must be out of the Humber on to-morrow night's tide, if we are to escape the hue and cry after us."

"Could n't we — We could n't go by way of Scarborough, I suppose?" Miss Fourmantelle suggested hesitatingly.

"By Scarborough? Hardly, child. Whitby, perhaps, if it were necessary. But Berenger would be more likely to think we had gone that way." He had opened the table drawer, evidently in quest of a packet of papers and a fat wallet which lay there, but with his hands upon them he stood irresolute.

"Laurence, what will they do to you when we are gone?" she asked sharply.

"Do to me? Oh, I don't know exactly. Nothing that can hurt me very much. A deal of solemn mummery with bell, book, and candle, no doubt — a sort of burying my character at a crossroads with a stake through its heart, for having committed social — We 've not a moment to lose," he broke off. "His lordship may return, and I must write a line to Lyd, at least. Will you go to the room I showed you and make your final preparations?"

He lifted a candle with which to light her on her errand; but his eyes, roaming over the snug and homely disorder of the little room, from the length of the book-strewn mantel above the fire to the carved knobs of the back of his chair, passed over

the bright presence of his guest as over empty space.

"Laurence, you shall not do it. You shall not go!" she exclaimed. Perhaps she herself could not have told whether she spoke from wounded vanity or quick compunction. And now that the time to act had come, it may be that a note of trepidation tinkled in her voice, as if she were wondering how much longer she could keep the situation in hand. "All this is too dear to you. You love it all too much, your daughter Lydia, your — yes, even your wife."

"Mrs. Sterne will not greatly miss me. Lyd will soon get over it, at her age. Mind you are quiet." He held out the candle.

Miss Fourmantelle lifted her hand to take it — and held it so. Above the flame her widening pupils met Sterne's in startled inquiry; for from the street came the clank and splash of horses' hoofs, the low rumble of wheels, the creak of straining harness. A ringing shout put a period to their speculations. Then another voice, evidently a post-boy's, began to call Heaven to witness that he was held up in the very street of a village. The arrogant tones of the Bishop of Sodor and Man replied. A fourth voice, clear and penetrating without loudness, expressing its owner's sentiments with the enunciation of a gentleman and with an eighteenth-century gentleman's freedom of thought and diction, cut the hubbub like a knife.

"Good Lord!" cried Miss Fourmantelle, stopping her ears with her fingers. "'T is he, 't is Berenger!

Hide me, for God's sake, Laurence. 'T is my persecutor!"

Deliberately Sterne set the candle on the table.

"Tell me, Kitty," he commanded. "Does Dick Berenger indeed pursue you? 'T is unthinkable!"

"He does. He does indeed. He will kill me if he finds me here. Oh, Laurence, hide me. Do not open the door! He will kill you also. Hear how he rages!"

A volley of dull blows, a falsetto howl from Prorkley, an indignant shout from the bishop, arose outside. Sterne, his eyes dancing with excitement, a candle held high in one hand, drew the bolt of the front door, though Miss Fourmantelle still implored and clung to his arm.

"He shall answer for his villainy to me, and before the bishop himself," he soothed her, flinging the door wide.

ACT III

MR. BERENGER

"My friend was already too good to lose,
And seemed in the way of improvement yet. . . ."
A Light Woman.

The rain of the earlier night had lessened to a driving mist, through which, as through gauze curtains at a playhouse, the backs of two smoking horses and the sparse, yellow teeth of a superannuated postboy gleamed in the rays of a pair of spattered chaise-lamps. Behind these the blank window-glasses reflected the flame of Sterne's candle and formed a confused and shifting background now to one and now to another strenuous outline of the little knot of figures that writhed and twisted at the carriage door.

"Berenger! Richard!" called Sterne, holding the candle high in an effort to shed its fluctuating light on the struggle. Another volley of blows was the sole response.

"Mercy! Rescue, my lord!" squeaked the voice of Prorkley; and a sudden flare of the candle revealed him spinning inside the blanket as a boy's top spins in a loop of string. A tall gentleman, whose fine lace jabot caught the uncertain light, grasped the blanket close to the chaplain's neck and lashed at

him with the flat of a naked smallsword. The little clergyman could hardly have felt the blows through the thick, rain-soaked folds, though he yelped at every one, and ever, as the gentleman stooped to strike beneath, the bishop clung to his arm.

"Wilt thou mutilate the Lord's servants, thou sacrilegious ruffian?" roared the bishop. "Hast no respect for the cloth?"

"There seems little enough cloth on this fellow. Let go my wrist, you thief," panted the gentleman, aiming beneath the blanket a blow which only the supreme activity of the chaplain avoided. "Let go my wrist or you will force me to slice him. You 'll hold me up, will you? You 'll cozen me out of my chaise? Let go my wrist or I 'll let daylight into you."

"Would 'st murder me?" cried the bishop, leaping back before the darting point of the blade.

"Richard," cried Sterne. "There 's a lady present, Richard."

The gentleman's hand fell from the blanket; his sword point sank to the earth; he bowed profoundly.

"I beg of the lady ten thousand pardons," he began in great confusion, "and make her ten thousand apologies. Good God, 't is Kitty!" he exclaimed, as his lifted eyes caught a glimpse of Miss Fourmantelle in tardy flight. He leaped in pursuit, Sterne at his heels.

My lord Bishop of Sodor and Man was a strategist. He wasted no time in wonder and thanksgiving at this unexpected deliverance.

"In, in," he shouted, catching Prorkley by the arm and dragging him to the chaise door. "Turn your horses, fellow. Ten shillings if you have us at York by sunrise."

But the postboy swung his left leg over the drooping neck of his mount and, with both feet comfortably resting on the pole, began to stuff a short clay pipe.

"Do you hear me?" vociferated the bishop. "A golden guinea for yourself if you drive us to York instanter. I am the Bishop of Sodor and Man, you gaping lout."

"If you was Bishop of Sodom and Gomorrah," replied the postboy dispassionately, "'t would make no difference to me. As man to man, I 'll tell you that if there was a watch here, which there ain't, I 'd call it and give you two in charge — tryin' to do a gentleman out of his chaise like you done!"

"Come inside. I will have satisfaction for these outrages there," blazed the bishop, and, dragging the still bewildered chaplain with him, he rushed into the house and flung open the study door.

Tempestuous as was his entrance, neither of the persons within accorded to it the slightest attention. Seated behind the writing-table as behind a bulwark, the unknown lady of the evening maintained an expression and attitude of tragic dignity. If in her eyes there lurked a tinge of fear, it was the fear of a child detected in mischief, for the emotion which — evidently, to any but a lover — threatened to destroy her pose, was a hardly restrained desire to laugh.

Facing her on the hearth stood the tall athletic form of the gentleman of the chaise, the flames lighting the dark green of his traveling suit and the silver hilt of the smallsword at his side. He wore his own hair, as the phrase went, powdered and tied at the nape of his neck with a broad black ribbon. From his olive cheeks the flush of anger had faded and left him, to all appearance, very cool, polished, self-possessed: decidedly the gentleman and man of taste, with a smack of both the courtier and the soldier. His eyes alone betrayed the passion behind this sedate exterior. Dark with sorrow and reproach, they rested upon the lady and changed neither the direction nor the intensity of their gaze as the bishop blustered up to him.

"You shall answer for this, sir — for this outrage, sir!" Had he been introducing his chaplain as a piece of evidence in the Peculiar Court of Pickering and Pocklington, he could hardly have thrust poor Mr. Prorkley under the gentleman's nose with a gesture more threatening.

The gentleman withdrew his eyes from the object of their contemplation and arched above them a pair of delicate black eyebrows.

"A sorry sight," he commented. "A disgusting sight to intrude upon a lady," he added with severity. "Remove it, sir!"

"You have assaulted my chaplain, sir," raged the bishop; "the chaplain of the Bishop of Sodor and Man. You shall answer for it, I promise you."

The gentleman raised a well-kept hand and coolly

put aside the thick forefinger which the bishop was shaking in his face.

"If I notice your insolence at all, sir," he returned with haughty languor, "it is to tell you that in one minute, if you have not left this room, I will call the servants and have you and your accomplice thrown into the street." And, turning toward the fire, he brushed negligently with his glove at a minute speck of mud on his boot, while the bishop, struck speechless, seemed to bloat visibly with his anger. Mr. Prorkley beheld his master in genuine alarm, but before the bishop found vent, or burst in the process of searching for words adequate to express his feelings, Mr. Sterne bustled into the room, closing the door behind him with great care.

In his dash into the house after Miss Fourmantelle and her pursuer, he had followed them no farther than was necessary to assure himself that they had entered the study. Leaving them there for the nonce to settle their differences as best they could, he had slipped off his shoes and made a swift and stealthy tour of the rambling rearward passages of the house, in dread that, what with the noise and tumult at the front, he should hear his wife and daughter astir and bent on investigation. Desperate though his situation still was, it had ceased to be quite hopeless now that Berenger had arrived; Berenger was an officer about the King; the Royal Princes were his friends; everybody liked him; he was the sort of person that even the Bishop of Sodor and Man would listen to. But not even Berenger's

presence could offset the scene which would inevitably occur if Mrs. Sterne should discover Kitty Fourmantelle under her roof and at such an hour of the night. Only the regular breathing of deep sleep, however, had come from behind the closed doors at which he listened, and he had returned to the study with feelings very like those of a reprieved criminal.

The air of the room was electric with emotion to a degree that would have been oppressive to a nature far less sensitive than his, but he advanced to the table as if he had no other preoccupation than the utmost solicitude for the two cobwebby bottles which he cradled in the hollow of his left arm. So tenderly did he bear them, so gently did he set them down, that his guests, in spite of their passions, turned to watch the process, and even the bishop allowed his pent-up breath to escape without bearing a torrent of well-chosen invective upon it. Before the charm could expire, Sterne broke the silence with introductions.

"My dear Berenger, permit me to acquaint you with two other guests of mine this eventful night: the Reverend Mr. Prorkley and the Reverend Mr. Hildesley, both of the Isle of Man — Mr. Richard Berenger, Gentleman of His Majesty's Horse. And since there was some lack of formality about their first meeting with her an hour ago, I beg to present my brethren of the cloth to Miss Catherine Fourmantelle, late of York."

Such was Prorkley's amazement at the sound of this name that he could only stand, staring, with

slack jaw. The bishop managed some sort of bow in return for Miss Fourmantelle's sweeping courtesy, but was so nonplused that no sounds came forth from his open mouth. Mr. Berenger, suffering from no such handicap, cut coldly in on the conclusion of these amenities.

"Mr. Hildesley," said he, with a hard glance at the bishop, "was but now indulging himself in the amusement of masquerading as his own diocesan."

"Ah?" smiled Sterne. "The name is identical, of course; but Mr. Prorkley explained to me earlier in the evening that Mr. Hildesley is not even a relative of the learned bishop."

If a bishop ever gulps, his lordship of Sodor and Man did so before he next spoke.

"Being the bishop's self, I could hardly be his relative. Such, I suppose, may have been my chaplain's thought," he explained with a steadiness truly admirable in the circumstances.

"And no Jesuit could have stated his meaning with greater exactitude," Sterne exclaimed cordially. "For Mr. Prorkley's satisfaction let me add that not for a moment did I fail to catch it."

"I must beg of your lordship ten thousand pardons." Mr. Berenger bowed. "I can urge in my defense only my ignorance of the customs of your diocese. Here in England, to be suddenly seized and held by the chaplain while the bishop attempts to appropriate the chaise is so unusual an experience as to be startling."

"Mr. Berenger's duties about the court, and the

love borne him by His Majesty and the Prince of Wales," Sterne intervened before the storm gathering on the bishop's brow could burst, "keep him from learning the customs of the remoter parts of the kingdom. Indeed both His Majesty and the Prince —"

But a glance showed that he need not finish the sentence. At the first word of the royal favor enjoyed by his adversary, the clouds had vanished from the episcopal countenance. It smiled. It nodded.

"The excessive zeal of my chaplain must excuse his conduct, as my own urgent desire to reach London must account for it. None can know better than Mr. Berenger that grave business of Church and State ill brooks delay." The bishop's voice had become a melodious rumble, and he ended with a glance which said as plainly as words that, but for the low persons standing by, he would gladly take Mr. Berenger into his confidence. The fact was that, with the hearing of the lady's name, he had begun to burn with such a desire to ask a certain question that he was ready to make almost any sacrifice in order to do so. It seemed impossible that there could be two Miss Catherine Fourmantelles of York, yet equally impossible that any professional singer, having once succeeded in fastening herself upon the heir of all the Montacutes, should let go her hold for the sake of a mere commoner, let him be even so highly placed as this Berenger was.

Meanwhile Mr. Berenger bowed and smiled his

acceptance of the implied apology; the bishop bowed; Mr. Prorkley bobbed the skirts of his outlandish mantle; and at the pull of Sterne's corkscrew one of the wine bottles popped a salute in honor of the armistice. The vicar, however, shot a doubtful glance at Miss Fourmantelle and caught her surveying this scene of stately urbanity which left her forgotten in the wings, as it were, with all the signs of restiveness which he had dreaded. What she was about to do he could not guess, but he saw that he had best speak at once if the situation were not to be complicated by some action on her part. He looked up slily from the task of screwing the corkscrew out of the cork.

"Why, my lord," said he, "I think you go beyond what is strictly necessary in your apology, considering that, but for your interference, Mr. Berenger would have gone thundering northward while the object of his pursuit lay hidden here."

Miss Fourmantelle started from her chair and flung herself on her knees before him, tragic face uplifted, clasped hands raised to touch his breast in supplication.

"Can you mean it? You would deliver me up to him?"

"No, my dear child, no," Sterne soothed her. As he gently raised her to her feet, it flashed across that quirky mind of his that not even the intrusion of Eve interrupted more uncomfortably the social intercourse of Adam with the other animals in the Garden. "So long as you are under my roof you shall

not lack protection either from him or from the whole world."

These words seemed to be too much for the icy passivity with which Berenger had so far watched the episode. Impatience burst the barriers of even his politeness.

"What the devil do you mean, Laurence?" he demanded. "Protection from me? By Gad —"

"I would remind Mr. Berenger that gentlemen — gentlemen of my cloth, especially — are not addressed after the fashion he has selected," Sterne interrupted coldly. But the glance of his eyes was as haughty as Berenger's was wrathful, and there was provocation in the smile with which he surrendered one hand to Miss Fourmantelle's questing clasp.

"I remind myself that gentlemen of your cloth stand quite safely on the point of honor," Berenger sneered.

"Yet," pursued Sterne evenly, "if I could imagine that any explanation of mine of a situation so entirely Mr. Berenger's affair — Good Heavens, Dick, where is your sense of delicacy, of common propriety?" he broke off with indignation. "You must be mad!"

"I may well be mad after these last ten days, sir," Berenger retorted. "This lady vanishes out of London; I seek her vainly through the suburbs on this clue and that; I travel post to York to find, this evening, that her mother has not heard from her in a fortnight. At last I learn that she took horses for Scarborough an hour before my arrival — and by

accident I find her here, sir, in your house and company, alone at this hour."

"And when did hour of day or night close the asylum of the Church and her ministers to the weak and persecuted?" flashed Sterne.

"And when did my betrothed come to be numbered among the weak and persecuted?" Berenger demanded, his left hand clenched on his sword hilt as he strode up to the vicar. "By Gad, sir —"

"Your betrothed, man! Why did n't you say so?" The light of battle in Sterne's eyes faded to a look of reproach. "Kitty, is this true, my girl?"

But Berenger answered.

"Of course she 's my betrothed. The banns were published for the third time last Sunday."

"In a little forgotten parish where nobody ever heard them," Miss Fourmantelle protested.

"Kitty, you deceived me," said Sterne sorrowfully. "She told me you pursued her, Dick. I had thought that young Rufus Montacute was her choice. When I left town every indication pointed that way. But when she told me —"

"You have known me all these months to so little purpose?" Berenger reproached him.

"I 've known the power of her beauty longer than that," Sterne defended himself, with a glint of amusement in his eyes.

"But 't is true," sobbed Miss Fourmantelle, her eyes blazing through tears of anger and vexation. "How else would you be here this moment, if you did not pursue me? You would compel me to marry

you. And I will not sit here while two gentlemen discuss me before two other gentlemen, as if I were some creature you had picked up in the street! We are not engaged, Richard — I broke the engagement a fortnight ago. I meant to have written you — but I have been so busy," she added through her handkerchief in a sort of muffled footnote.

The four men exchanged glances; the bishop and Prorkley with complete understanding. Here evidently was the explanation of the rumor which had driven them southward at such speed; some account of the publication of the banns had reached Lady Montacute's agent, and he, with fears already aroused by gossip, had substituted the name of her son for that of Berenger. Sterne, meanwhile, looked at Berenger with a rueful and commiserating smile, which the latter returned with a glance of despairing impotence, while Miss Fourmantelle's weeping made all four of them feel as if they were involved in a tenacious and clammy mist. Uncomfortably they began to glance from her to one another.

But all at once it seemed to Sterne that through the ambush of her handkerchief one bright eye gleamed forth in calculating observation. He walked quickly up to Berenger and turned him toward her with a twitch of the sleeve. Then, addressing the bishop: —

"My lord, I make bold to suggest that you and I and Mr. Prorkley ascertain that the chaise still waits," he said; and with a wink of the broadest he bowed the two clergymen through the door and followed.

Miss Fourmantelle watched them go with such a glance as the spent swimmer flings to a vanishing sail. She felt herself about to drown in a sea of truth. For, somehow, it was always much more difficult to mislead one man alone than several at once, and especially when the one could plead previous ill-treatment. Long before this hour of the night she had begun to feel out of all patience with men. Such delightful, masterful creatures until they were conquered; after that they were like putty in one's hands, but a kind of putty which at the most unpredictable moments turned into brittle glass that shivered and cut one's fingers at a touch. Passion, the only thing that made them desirable, was what ruined them. Witness her experience of three of them in the last ten days! There was Montacute to begin with, acting the jealous schoolboy, flouncing off to Scarborough at a gibe he had richly earned, and writing every day the sort of letters Roman Brutus might have sent to an erring Portia. Then Berenger, the balanced, alert man of the world. In any other state of mind would n't he have been struck with the coincidence of Captain Lord Montacute's taking a month's leave on the very day of her disappearance from London and have searched the files of the Archbishop of Canterbury's recorder of special licenses? Instead of that he had raged on her trail like a questing hound, so close behind at last that she had attempted to hide in Sterne's vicarage, hoping that he would rush on past. She could n't very well present herself at Scarborough with him at her

heels and achieve any such journey's end as she had begun to long for.

As for Sterne, she had fully intended to tell Sterne the whole story, as soon as she had paid him off for his neglect of her in London and for his ill-concealed dismay at her appearance in his house. He could have sent her on to Malton in his own carriage, whence she could have taken a hack post chaise to Scarborough. But he, forsooth, must needs catch fire at the crazy notion of flight to France and rush her off her feet, in spite of her protests. Had she not protested, bidden him consider all he was leaving, the consequences of such a course, in vain? Yet now that the cold fit was on him, look at him! The loathsome parade of delicate perception with which he had left her at the mercy of Berenger's inquisition, her predicament to be made even more humiliating than it was by having the story of it wrung from her by honied entreaties!

There are certain announcements that change their character according to the circumstances in which they are made. Her explanation involved one that ought always to be a glorious proclamation with trumpets. Told here and now, it would sound so little better than a squalid excuse that she determined to delay it till the last possible moment. If the fairy of unexpectedness should continue to preside over the events of the night, who could tell what chance might not still bring deliverance? She lowered her handkerchief, but did not raise her eyes.

"Well, Richard?" she breathed.

It was all that was needed to bring him to her feet.

"My goddess!" he cried in gentle triumph, pressing her hands to his heart.

"I 'm not your goddess, Richard," she began. "You must not —"

"Because I seemed to doubt you?" he interrupted vehemently. "Had I really doubted, should I have followed you? There was indeed a rumor that you and young Montacute — For two days I ranged London like a madman. Then I learned that he had gone to Scarborough, alone. I pictured you betrayed, deserted. At last I heard that you had posted north. Where were you? Where have you been?"

"I — I went to Bath for a few days. You — Rufus Montacute — you give me no peace between you."

"Forgive me," he pleaded. "If you knew the state of mind I have been in — Why, when I found you under this roof to-night, as you saw, I was ready to suspect even dear old harmless Laurence here."

Miss Fourmantelle rose quietly but with decision. Faithful as she may be to one, no woman likes to have the devotion of another admirer put down to mere constitutional inanity. For a moment she hesitated. Then a look of triumphant calculation lighted her features. But he, kneeling, with her hands against his lips, saw only the flushed column of her throat and the lift of her white chin above the lacy disturbance of her breast. Then she was bending over him, her hands thrilling about his neck, the

effulgence of her eyes flooding his members. Five minutes later he had the door open and stood, transfigured by his happiness, before the three gentlemen in the hallway.

"Laurence, Laurence," he exclaimed with the smile of a bridegroom, "think you we shall have influence enough between us to obtain a dispensation from the Archbishop of York for a special license? Shall we be able to contrive it?"

Sterne flashed a look at the bishop.

"You see, my lord?" he asked as he whipped in after the radiant Berenger, and the door closed behind him.

The bishop leaned his fat shoulders against the wall and, had he not been a great prelate, it would have to be admitted that he sulked. His special mission of haste had turned into a wild-goose chase, evidently. The young Lord Montacute was in no matrimonial danger from Miss Catherine Fourmantelle — at least for the present, he added to himself; for he was still not without certain suspicions. That being so, the memory of discomforts uselessly endured sharpened his sense of the incongruity of the position in which he found himself, and, while he was no longer compelled to hasten his journey, his desire to be done with Coxwold, its vicar, and all it contained, made him as eager to depart as he had ever been. Such was his state when the study door opened again and Miss Fourmantelle stood before him, the crimson lining of her cloak set off by the dark green of Berenger's habit and Sterne's elegant

black. With the grey hood half fallen from her hair, a regal self-surrender in her eyes, and happy blushes staining her face and neck, she went straight up to the bishop and held out her hand.

"May I ask your lordship's good wishes and, perhaps, your lordship's blessing?" she begged, her eyes suddenly downcast. Then, before he could realize what she was about, she courtesied to the ground and pressed her lips to the great amethyst on the hand he had instinctively offered her.

Better men than Mark Hildesley need have thought no shame of instant capitulation to so sweet a petitioner. There was something papistical in her action, to be sure. Ladies kissed the rings of cardinals on the Continent, he understood. But, after all, why not? It was the office they adored, not the man. Nevertheless, he rather gasped than spoke: —

"You have them both, my best wishes and my blessing." As an obvious afterthought he added, more unctuously, "my child."

"My child!" he said again in confused remonstrance, as she would have repeated her act of homage, and prevented that by raising her hand to his lips. At the moment it seemed the most natural action in the world, and so she took it, floating lightly away to Berenger.

"I want some money, Richard," she announced.

Berenger would have filled the pink cups of her upturned palms with coined gold if she had not checked his prodigality with low laughter and glided to the outer door. Before any of them guessed her purpose,

she had it open and was running down the wet street toward the chaise as it climbed from the watering trough at the bottom of the hill. Crowding the doorway, the four men saw her pause in the light of the lamps and the postboy stop his horses beside her. Berenger smiled as the chink of money reached his ears. Then she had sprung into the chaise, and it covered the short intervening distance at a trot, swinging smartly round before the vicarage door.

"The lady begs as Mr. Sterne will bring her luggage to York in the morning in time for the wedding," announced the postboy with a yellow grin.

Berenger wrung Sterne's hand.

"Forgive me again," he gulped. He shook hands with Prorkley. "And do you forgive me too, sir, I entreat." To the bishop he bowed, one foot on the step of the chaise, its dark interior gaping behind him through the open door. "You and I are quits, my lord, I conceive." Then to the postboy, gayly, "*En avant!* Go ahead, you idiot!"

The whip cracked over the horses' backs; the chaise lurched forward in a shower of mud and sparks as the shod hoofs slipped among the ledges; and Sterne, the bishop, and the chaplain leaned forward in some anxiety to follow the careening flare of the lamps as the vehicle tore down the long hill at break-neck speed. But its continuing safety was not alone responsible for Sterne's sigh of relief when at last a turn in the road hid it from his sight. The thought of what he had been saved from, of the idiot he had been about to make of himself, of the scandal which

the bishop would now think twice before he set going, since it would involve the wife of a royal favorite, so possessed him that he turned to his guests with a quite genuine cordiality, promising them transportation to York in his own carriage as soon as daylight had set his coachman astir. For the meantime he suggested a resumption of the meal which Miss Fourmantelle's entrance had interrupted two hours earlier.

It never occurred to him that he was again making his usual mistake in forgetting that the harmless truth of any matter is the last thing which the world desires to accept. Not even the fact that the bishop preceded him through the door without replying put him on his guard for what was yet to come.

ACT IV

"STOLE AWAY!"

"Sir (said Johnson to me with an air of triumph) Mr. Berenger knows the world."

BOSWELL.

BACK in the study again, overflowing the easy-chair which so short a while before had been the commodious setting of the beauty of York Assembly Rooms, my lord Bishop of Sodor and Man went through the sensations of a person returning to consciousness after a bad dream. But he realized with mortification that what he recalled had actually taken place. He had acted like a man bewitched. Worse still, something of the charm worked in him yet; else why should middle-aged Mark Hildesley, one of the ecclesiastical lords of England, the translator of nobody knew how many pious books into the native Manx of his diocese, still pulsate to the impact of a kiss which had somehow contrived to spill off the smooth surface of his ring and electrify his carnal fabric? His ring finger burned to the degree that made him hide it in the skirts of his coat. But he saw plainly now the plot of which he had been made the victim, saw how perfectly it would have suited all parties concerned to have him go on believing that

this clever woman's lover, this Gentleman of His Majesty's Horse, was about to make her his wife. The thing was too transparent! They forgot what he had seen at his first arrival. And Gentlemen of His Majesty's Horse don't marry women of that sort. Why should they?

Behind the bishop, Mr. Prorkley bent over the table as if among the litter of plates and glasses he still read the magic scrawl of the new *Shandy*. But his eyes were soft and his lips still tremulous with the memory of the finger-tips which Miss Fourmantelle had permitted them to touch in her passage to the door. Of a sudden he babbled out his ecstasy: —

"A woman in a thousand, my lord! Surely a woman to die for!"

"A woman who will give those foolish enough to interest themselves in her frequent opportunities of dying, sir," thundered the bishop, with the venom of one just delivered from enchantment, "of dying, sir, on a rival's sword." He picked up the plate Sterne had placed in his lap and set it on the table with force.

"My good sir," he addressed the vicar testily, "in all ingenuousness, I do not see how I can accept more of your hospitality, considering the course which duty marks before me."

Sterne could only look at him in amazement.

"Your duty, my lord?" he queried at last. "Your lordship would have me understand that you still labor under the misapprehension —"

"I labor under no misapprehension, Mr. Sterne,"

the bishop cut him short. It was that hour of the twenty-four when crude humanity most easily slips the fetters of convention, and he went on with a sneer. "This precious comedy was very cleverly conceived, no doubt. If the great names you so artfully paraded did not frighten me, at least this pother and pretense about a marriage was to trick me into holding my tongue. I may know little of the world, sir, but I do know that a gentleman in Mr. Berenger's station does not marry his friend's mistress nor intervene in behalf of his mistress's cast-off lover."

Mr. Sterne had been in the act of filling the bishop's glass, and for an instant Prorkley looked to see his master brained with the bottle: so did the lightning leap in Sterne's dark eyes. The wine brimmed over and drummed loudly on the floor while priest and bishop glared at one another. Then Sterne said in a low tone: —

"I thought it was only French bishops who felt constrained to kiss the hands of such as your lordship has seen fit to mention."

The shaft went home. In the sudden revelation of himself as acted upon rather than acting, the bishop had forgotten the detail of which Sterne now so mercilessly reminded him. The recollection of it carried him down to such deeper depths of humiliation that his anger evaporated. For, domineering as he was, he was a man fundamentally honest and sincere.

"Mr. Sterne," he said, after a long silence, "I had

no intention of doing such a thing. I give you my word that —"

"My lord," cried Sterne cordially, "I need no asseveration. Your instinct was sounder than your reason, and you were wise enough to follow it: that is all. I should greatly value the honor of your hand on your lordship's instinctive appreciation of that lady's character."

He held out his hand, and the bishop took it, after a second's hesitation. If this were true, the idea that he had fallen under the spell of a Yorkshire Circe came to nothing, young Lord Montacute was safe, and there was no possible need of rushing on to London with belly-joggling haste. But to accept a charitable interpretation of the episode opened so convenient, so pleasant a way out of his difficulties, so instantly reëstablished him in his own conceit, that, old puritan as he was, he could hardly believe it right to do so.

"You think that he wishes to marry her — actually?" he asked, and for him the tone in which he spoke might fairly be called a timid one.

On Sterne's lips and in his eyes was the wry smile of a bittersweet emotion. This was just such a scene of delicate sensibility — of what was called the "sentimental," before that word was ruined — as his soul loved.

"Recollect, my lord, the tone and the circumstances in which he first called her his betrothed and told us the banns had been thrice published," he reassured the bishop. "He had neither the manner

of feigning nor any cause for it then, you will remember."

"And he still, you think —"

"Why not? Dr. Johnson once said of him, I understand, 'Mr. Berenger knows the world.' At least he knows it too well to judge a poor concert singer by the standards of conduct of a young lady of undoubted quality, which — pardon me — it is the besetting sin of our cloth to do. No. You may set your mind at rest, my lord. The only thing that may prevent this marriage is the young lady herself."

"The young lady herself, sir?" exclaimed the bishop, shocked into a resumption of something very like his customary manner by this statement. "Explain yourself, I beg. You must have reasons for such a remark."

"On the contrary, I make it because of a lack of reasons, reasons for her flight from this very marriage, for her keeping on northward instead of going to her mother at York, and especially, in the light of all this, reasons for her sudden complacency and happy departure. You, my lord, — unfamiliar with such people, as I take you to be, — would perhaps ascribe her conduct to the supposed instability of women of her profession. But I assure you that she is fundamentally a most circumspect and practical person. Like all women, she hopes to marry and means to marry well. So, if —"

"Tell me, Mr. Sterne," the bishop interrupted him, stung by an uncomfortable recollection of something

which he had but now thought it safe to dismiss from his mind, "the name of Lord Rufus Montacute has been mentioned more than once in connection with this lady to-night. A rumor that he was about to marry her reached her ladyship, his mother, a few days ago —"

"Lord Montacute does n't happen to be spending his leave at Scarborough, does he?" Sterne broke in. "If he does —"

The bang of the outer door against the wall of the passage stopped him. The study door was flung open, and Mr. Berenger stood before them, pale, hatless, splashed and ingrained with mud, holding in his hand a spattered but still burning chaise-lamp.

"Have you seen her?" he asked, before the astounded silence produced by his entry could burst into a storm of interrogation. "The chaise ran away down the hill and smashed on the milestone just round the corner — Satan confound that grinning devil of a postboy!" He limped to the table and drained the bishop's brimming glass without ceremony.

"And the lady — your betrothed?" queried Prorkley.

Mr. Berenger turned with the empty glass in his left hand and held up the lamp significantly in his right.

"I have searched in vain every yard of the way back." He sat down stiffly, resting the lamp on his knees.

"You think she was thrown out upon the road?" asked the bishop unhappily. Certain things not long ago upon his tongue were not what one would care to have spoken of the dead.

"She must have been thrown over the housetops then," Mr. Berenger answered wearily. "No, gentlemen. I believe the chaise was already empty when I got into it. I know it was a minute or two later. The suddenness of our start flung me from my feet before I could seat myself, and when I recovered my balance I found that I was alone and the farther door swinging wide."

"The tricksy jade!" cried Sterne, between admiration and relief from the fright that still beaded his brow with sweat.

"But we saw her get in, with our own eyes," the bishop protested. "We all watched —"

"Yes, my lord. But 't was the chaise we watched *after* we saw her get into it," Sterne explained with a smile. "'T is a stale prank on hackney coachmen in town to bid one drive you to some distant destination and, entering by one door under the fellow's eyes, to step out by the other as he sets his horses in motion."

"But that is unthinkable in a lady!" exclaimed the chaplain.

The bishop broke out in his deepest tones: —

"We must search at once. If Mr. Sterne is right, I greatly fear we have frightened the poor girl — the poor young lady, I would say — to her hurt. Indeed, how else are we to explain her collusion with

the postboy, which now becomes evident? Did you question him, sir?"

"I had no opportunity. He rushed away after the horses," Berenger replied.

"Mr. Sterne," demanded the bishop, "what field paths, what hiding places, give opportunity for cover and escape hereabouts? Are there any streams or deep brooks? Not a moment is to be lost."

Berenger shot a glance of amazement at Sterne, in reply to which he received a solemn wink to show that this sudden about-face on the bishop's part was no mystery to the vicar. Both men believed they knew Kitty Fourmantelle too well to have to consider the fear which had evidently taken possession of the bishop, but neither saw any reason why he should not be allowed to suffer from it for a while; and Sterne shook his head lugubriously.

"We must have one more lantern at least," the bishop fumed, striding to the door. "Prorkley, come with me. We will take the byways and plantations on the far side. Do you and Mr. Berenger search on this, Mr. Sterne."

Ten minutes later a wakeful inhabitant of Coxwold might have inferred a new Jacobite plot from the mysterious glancing of lights along the wet garden walls and through the dripping hedgerows that formed the lateral boundaries of the village.

"What do you make of it?" Berenger asked, when they had been stumbling among briars and stones and slipping on greasy clay for half an hour. What with the darkness, the wet, and the bleak inhospi-

tality of the night, his reason had fought a losing battle with the apprehensions suggested by the bishop. He drove at a glistening hedge and broke through, drenched to the skin. "Not according to our friend of Sodor and Man surely?"

Sterne charged the hedge and stood beside him, panting.

"Suicide? No. Montacute."

"Montacute?" Berenger repeated after him. "Hardly. That young ass did give me some anxiety, I admit. But he rushed off to Scarborough days ago."

"And it was to Scarborough our Kitty was posting when your chase became too hot for her and she ran to earth with me."

There came a change in the look of uneasiness on Berenger's face, but in an instant he smiled.

"No, Laurence, no. That is your jealousy. That 's what I 've been suffering from too. Why is it that we men are so ready to believe the worst of the women we adore? Think what such a course on her part would imply — following him half across England!"

"It might imply that they are already married, have quarreled, and made it up by letter. There has been time enough for that since she disappeared from London — between two such passionate children as they are."

"'T is possible, of course," Berenger admitted, absently thrusting his sheathed sword into a dark hedge-corner with a force that would have done the

object of his search permanent injury, had she been unfortunate enough to be hidden there. "When you left us alone together she told me she had been at Bath. But —"

"But, thanks to this same jealousy you speak of, an explanation so decent never crossed your mind," Sterne took him up triumphantly. "It never once occurred to you to consult the registry of special licenses, I warrant. Nor would it have occurred to me in the circumstances, my dear fellow. Ah, what filthy minds we have, we poor humans — and here I 've been hating Sodor and Man for being no better than myself!"

Berenger gave a short laugh that did not sound as if he were particularly pleased by this moralizing.

"Believing as you do, I am surprised that you have come out on this quest," he said stiffly. "Pray don't feel obliged to keep on with it simply because I do."

"Don't fly into a pet, Richard," Sterne replied gently. "Even if I should be right, that is no reason to let the poor child go wandering off cross-country in the dark. But you don't know all that I know. A rumor of the marriage I speak of had reached old mamma Montacute in the ancestral stronghold, the bishop tells me. That was what was driving him to London at such speed."

"Pooh!" Berenger scoffed. "Your mamma Montacutes always think every woman in the world has her mouth wide open to gobble up their sons."

As he spoke he led the way with undiminished

energy to the next promising enclosure. But though they left no covert undrawn on their side of the village, and although the bishop and Prorkley may be supposed to have worked with equal thoroughness on the other, the four had only the same story of failure to tell when chance brought them together in the churchyard at the first crack of the early summer dawn.

Well-nigh spent, the bishop slumped on the flat top of a tomb, heavy hearted with remorse and penitence. Conscience tormented him with the recollection of many ill-chosen words — that weakness of his for saying a thing with the greatest force the facts could be made to bear; his rounding upon the poor young lady, when he supposed that he was leaving the vicarage forever; the terms in which he had spoken of her even after he had been given every assurance that, let her past be what it might, Berenger was — to put it at its lowest terms — about to "make an honest woman of her." Memory pleaded that he had said no worse than "a mistress's cast-off lover." Coward conscience, triumphing over his bewilderment and fatigue, insisted that he had said "cast-off lover of a drab." The words tinkled in his weary brain with a lilt outrageously convincing. Why did they do that, if he had not used them? The thought of what Sterne had told him since tortured him: how the Fourmantelles had been deprived of their property and driven out of France on account of their stubborn Protestantism; how gallantly the young lady had striven to support herself and her

widowed mother by her voice, while a sister, by conforming, lived at ease on the ancestral property — the name being in reality *de* Fourmantelle. The tale had not lost by Sterne's telling; and the bishop, though he ached to close his eyes in uneasy cat-naps, made a penance of keeping them fixed on the distant figure of Prorkley, to whom he had delegated the task of following a path which led through a stile and on over a series of gentle undulations.

The sky had cleared just before dawn and, as if to mock the low spirits of the searchers, the day was coming in beauteous clarity. A little way off, with lanterns burning pale beside them, Sterne and Berenger swung their legs from the top of another tomb. The vicar had just remarked that the search could go no farther without horses, when Berenger caught his arm and pointed. On the road a big man on a big grey horse was pounding up out of the north-east at a round trot: a military man, it appeared, for his hat had a martial cock to it, and there came a flash of scarlet as the morning wind blew back his cloak. Spying the three figures among the gravestones, he rode his horse at the churchyard wall, cleared it, and ambled toward them.

"Goddess of Wonders!" exclaimed Berenger, slipping to the ground. "'T is young Montacute!"

"Now we shall have the fat in the fire unless we are careful." Sterne addressed the bishop. "Mind that, my lord. Ours must be the more voluble curiosity. If we ever let him begin to question us, we are lost."

But the bishop could only sit and stare. Draggled, wan, bristling with twenty-four hours' growth of beard, and roosting thus in a country churchyard at an hour when all decent people should be abed, what sort of aspect must he present to this young lord temporal of his diocese? The thought deprived him of the use of his faculties.

For the moment the unexpected encounter seemed to put Lord Rufus Montacute into a state little better than the bishop's. There were dark circles under his eyes, but his complexion, white with fatigue and of the peculiar clarity that goes with his name, had turned fiery. A mechanical military salute was the best he could manage in return for Berenger's ironical bow and Sterne's humorous nod. In the neighborhood of twenty-three years old, there yet lingered about his great frame and lofty stature something of the exuberant development of first manhood; and the air of friendly patronage which he tried for as he addressed the bishop had to struggle for victory against more than a suggestion of the schoolboy caught out of bounds by his tutor.

"Ah, Hildesley, what you doing here? Pastoral visit for the Archbishop?" he asked; then, with a show of recollecting himself, "I beg your pardon, my lord. Never can keep in mind your lordship's promotion, 'pon my soul! Wish your lordship good-morning, I 'm sure. 'Pon my soul I do. My mother was in good health when you left Man, I hope."

It was done crudely enough, to be sure, but done gallantly, all things considered. To the others the

bishop might look no more than a tired, fat old man, but to young Rufus Montacute he would never quite cease to be the domineering ecclesiastic in whose leading-strings he had passed a boyhood which had been allowed to end only two years ago; and after spending the whole of the dark and stormy night in the saddle with black care sticking to the cantle like a bur, it took all his resolution to strike thus hard and ruthlessly for the right to call his soul his own. His last ten days in Scarborough, moreover, had been days in hell for him: days of bewilderment, remorse, despair, of letters from which passionate longing had to be crushed out by expressions of wounded dignity, days of waiting for the post until he grew ashamed to be seen again in the gay, indolent throng that attended its arrival, and fumed in his chambers while his servant went on the errand which had always been vain.

"His lordship's chaise missed the road last night and came to grief on our hill," Sterne explained, as the bishop seemed unable to answer for himself. "Hence the honor of his presence. And since I desired his opinion on some alterations I think of making in my poor church —"

"Your horse is overweary for jumping, Lord Montacute." Berenger's trained eye had been caught by an abrasion on one of the animal's forelegs, and he straightened up from examining it as his friend's lumbering lie threatened to break down in its tracks. "He has barked his shin on yonder wall, I observe."

"Trust the author of the *New System of Horsemanship* to note the fact." Sterne smiled in relief at escaping from his task of prevarication.

"He may well be a little weary. I rode him out of Scarborough yesterday afternoon, we supped at New Malton late last night, and since then we 've been wandering about this confounded countryside —" The young man paused; some explanation had to be trumped up for so extraordinary a proceeding. The fact was that he had been unable to endure life at Scarborough any longer and, determined to put an end to his suspense by searching London for the object of his affections, he had set off alone, bidding his man follow with his luggage by coach.

"I am about to volunteer for service with our troops on the Continent," he went on, — he did indeed intend to, if the worst came to the worst, — "and I thought I had better accustom Renegade here to night work in preparation for the field."

Berenger nodded approvingly.

"Don't risk him at another wall, however, till he has had a good rest," he cautioned.

"I had hoped," Lord Montacute continued more freely, "to reach Newburgh Priory in time for breakfast with Lord Fauconberg. Can you give me the direction, Mr. Sterne?"

Sterne's volubility in explaining the road might have seemed suspicious to a traveler less eager to proceed than Lord Montacute evidently was. The bishop's air of being about to say something may have influenced both of them, but his anxious glance

and general look of perturbation were upsetting to Sterne particularly.

"The right-hand turn at the crossroads," he was finishing in haste, when a shrill cry turned all eyes in the direction of the stile. Prorkley, too eager to wait until he had loosed the folds of his blanket, which had become tangled in the bars, was holding up some bright object in confirmation of his words.

"The soft clay of the path is full of her footsteps," he cried joyfully, "and I 've found her slipper."

"'Her footsteps'? Whose slipper?" young Montacute demanded. "What on earth —"

"A poor lady's. She wandered off in the night," Sterne began. "The fact is, we 've been searching for her for the last two hours. But I thought that to prevent scandal I —"

"Perhaps you will be kind enough to help us, Rufus," babbled the bishop. "Your being mounted would be of great assistance; and it happens you know her, I think. A Miss Fourmantelle of York, more lately living in London?"

"Miss Fourmantelle? Not Kitty Fourmantelle?" Montacute looked with sudden fierceness from Sterne to Berenger. "What brings her here?"

"My lord," replied Sterne, "we have had several answers to that question, one from the lady herself, but I believe you could answer it as well as anybody, since it is my guess that she is on her way to Scarborough."

"On the way to Scarborough? Down that path?"

Turf from his horse's hoofs flew past their heads

as the young man dashed between the tombs; and, clearing the wall so close to the stile that the entangled chaplain quailed, he disappeared at a gallop.

Sterne and Berenger rushed after him till they were checked by Prorkley in the stile. By the time they had opened a passage by freeing him the bishop had lumbered up, and, being let through first, kept them jostling at his heavy heels in the narrow way. The trail was plain in all the low, wet places, save where the flying hoofs of Montacute's charger had abolished it — the sharp imprint of one small shoe alternating with the ribbed pattern of the ball and toe of a silk-clad foot. From the undulating summit the path dropped steeply to a valley, in the midst of which rose some ecclesiastical ruins in an advanced state of decay. Straight for these led the trail. A dilapidated wall between four and five feet high surrounded them and appeared to account for the fact that Lord Montacute was not in sight as they hurried up to it.

EPILOGUE

"EARTH'S RETURNS"

". . . A girl with eager eyes and yellow hair
Waits me there."

Love Among the Ruins.

THE storm had ended in a five-minute volley of hail that roared on Coxwold roofs and drove Sterne and his fellow searchers to the shelter of wall and hedgerow till it passed. At its onslaught Miss Fourmantelle cowered still closer under the arched doorway of Coxwold Church, whence for some time she had been watching the erratic passage of the lanterns. When it ceased and they appeared to be converging on her place of refuge, she fled through the churchyard stile to the open country beyond.

Her courage was still high. In the full flower of youth and health, the swift light pace at which she sped along the path in her wide, sweeping skirt and tight bodice was a miracle of grace and freedom. But the antic mood in which she had begun this final escapade had succumbed to the darkness, the muddy footing, and the damp chill of the night an hour ago. Once clear of the village — she had assured herself — and with the coming of daylight, the first country cart could be bribed to carry her

to New Malton, where she could hire a post chaise for Scarborough. Safety, repose, and love awaited her there; and that sacrifice of pride which she must make to win them, and which had seemed so enormous when she had determined on it, looked infinitesimal now, the pride itself mean and cheap.

She had soon found, however, that, like most courageous people who have never attempted to cross open country in the dark and the rain, she had underrated the difficulties of the task. In every lane and field path pools of standing water, thickets whose laden branches drenched her cloaked shoulders, had driven her back in the hope that some other would prove more practicable; and she had just recoiled from the third of these adventures when the sortie of lanterns from the vicarage had sent her scuttling for the shelter of the churchyard.

Only her anger still carried her forward — that and her revolt at the thought of being run down and compelled to explain the true motive of her actions as the only possible excuse for her behavior: to have to say, "But I 'm married already," like a child confessing to a theft of jam! And to have to go on, "We quarreled and I 'm on my way to make it up"! She could imagine her pursuers in a circle round her, weary, draggled, angry in proportion to the fright she had given them. A giggle at the mental picture of them which she conjured up cut short her musings. But next moment the strap of one of her slippers broke, leaving her half unshod, and her resentment flamed afresh.

Moreover, when she turned to search for the missing slipper, though she could have sworn she had gone at least a mile along that slimy path, the lanterns flitting from tomb to grassy mound in the churchyard seemed to flash in her very eyes. The sky was clearing, too: full half the firmament sparkled above her; near the horizon there was a pallor as of first dawn; and suddenly she felt as naked as the stars.

"Oh, serve them right!" she muttered, and the last vestiges of compunction left her as, too apprehensive to search further, she set off at a limping run. She was glad of it all, glad she had done every bit of it. That little comedy she had played on Sterne, luring him to the decision to flee with her to France — had n't he deserved it, after his neglect and his reception of her as if she had descended upon him to break up his home? Richly! And Berenger? Well, if a man won't take a plain "No" for an answer, but insists on reasons when there are no reasons a woman can give without looking like a fool, he must expect such treatment as she can give him. As for the bishop, his blast of denunciation and his kiss on her hand — oh, they were all alike, with their starchy codes and their flabby conduct!

Even Montacute — yes, even her Rufus, with his stilted, ill-spelled letters one could hardly decipher, except that she loved him and he was young and she could make something out of him yet. But the way he had acted, flouncing away from what was really their marriage breakfast — for from the church

they had posted directly to Bath — in a jealous fury, when he had made her his by all the laws of God and Nature, simply because she had refused to agree that Berenger was a pedantic, highfaluting coxcomb! Too young to know that thus a man will spice the sweetness of possession, she had lost her patience when he began to vapor of challenges and duels.

"You would have to seek an introduction to him first," she had flung out.

The gibe was palpably absurd. In fact, the two men had met in her company. But to young Montacute, still new to London, and not quite sure of his place in the inmost circle, it had been a barbed dart whose rankling had inflamed his mind against all sense and reason. He would keep her informed of his whereabouts; when she could think and talk like a sensible woman his arms would be open to her. Such was the note on which he had departed.

The crest of a sudden declivity brought her to the realization of her surroundings once more. Below her a broad valley brightened from moment to moment in the growing daylight. Behind, the tower of Coxwold Church was dwarfed by distance at last. But the lanterns of her pursuers, glancing small and pale about its base, threw her into panic again. Miles from any adequate concealment, to say nothing of the means to continue her flight, she hurried down the hill, because there was nothing else to do. Even the great road which now began to show through the mists of the morning, far to the left, was recognizable by reference to the church

tower as only the road to York. She was on the wrong side of the village altogether. A circuit of miles would be necessary to gain the New Malton road, and even on this path small sharp stones and projecting roots and stems tripped her and bruised her shoeless foot continually, pick her way as she might. She pressed on, breathless with fatigue and unreasoning apprehension, ready to weep with discouragement and pain.

A half-ruined wall rose before her, but the path twisted round its angle. A low place in it gave her a glimpse within, and she scrambled over as instinctively as some spent animal of the chase. A lofty, pointed arch dominated the enclosure. Great hewn stones and bits of carved work littered the ground amid luxuriant clumps of wild roses; and at the farther end of a little lawn that glittered with dew two great columns lifted their shattered capitals and broken springers into mid-air. The lowest course of the wall of the ancient baptistry enclosed the grassy space. In its centre a tiny spring welled to form a pool in the broken pavement, whence through mantling watercress it stole away along a gravelly fissure in the sod.

Kitty Fourmantelle sank upon the grass and pressed her aching head against the cold roughness of a block of stone. In the reaction of all her powers, she shivered. Her draggled skirts chilled her to the knees; the collar of her drenched cloak stuck to her neck with clammy tenacity. A streak of mud on the crimson lining caught her glance, then another,

and a great triangular rent through cloth and lining too. She hid her face in her hands and wept.

The warmth of sunshine caused her to lift her head. She drew a quick, sobbing breath, and the tonic air of sunrise filled her lungs. She sprang up, kicked off her remaining slipper, and paced the yielding turf till her blood tingled, then sought the spring and stooped above the reflection of her disordered hair and dress with an exclamation of dismay. A segment of moss-covered coping made a cushion for her knees. To slip her arms from the sleeves of her loosened bodice took but an instant. Parting the clustered cress at the margin, she stooped her face to meet its reflection between the white stems and, all sparkling with the diamond drops, she raised it to look abroad while she sluiced the icy water along her arms and over her white neck and dimpled shoulders.

The ring of iron on the beaten path startled her to her feet. With one arm flung up to shield and one flung back, she poised on the verge of the spring, her eyes dilated, her hair glistening, her flesh aglow. To modern eyes, in her eighteenth-century disarray, in that improbable romantic setting, she would have seemed a charming subject for Greuze or Fragonard. To young Rufus Montacute, who could look over the top of the wall from the height of his saddle, and who had seen Cleopatra on the London boards in a Louis XV wig and panniers, she seemed a nymph of the fountain. He dashed an incredulous hand across his eyes, drove home his spurs with an exclamation of delight, and, heedless of Berenger's warning of a

few minutes before, lifted the grey charger to the jump.

Before his onset Kitty Fourmantelle fled for the shelter of the arch. A crash, the cascade of heavy stones, a thud, and sudden stillness made her turn. Amid the litter of masonry brought down by his fall the great horse lay with a broken neck. Some yards ahead of him his rider sprawled face downward, motionless on the turf.

When the bishop, Sterne, Berenger, and Prorkley panted up to peer through the gap made by the charger's fall, young Lord Montacute had opened his eyes. His face was white, but he smiled, although he was showing no inclination to move his cheek from the rosy shoulder on which it was pillowed. With her dress still in the most delightful or — according to the beholder's taste — the most shocking, disorder, Miss Fourmantelle held it there while she bathed a deep cut on his forehead. At his smile she gave a low sweet cry and drooped her head quickly over him till their lips met.

Mr. Berenger turned his back promptly. The bishop moved his feet, but could not wrest away his fascinated glance. Mr. Prorkley looked as if he were going to weep. Sterne watched with that wry smile of painful pleasure or not altogether unpleasant pain which he alone could wear. The thud of a horse's hoofs from the direction of the York road brought them to themselves. Berenger's superannuated postboy, every yellow tooth shining in appreciation

of the tableau and of the dissolving effect upon it of his arrival, slid off a muddy horse and pulled a totally imaginary forelock.

"Ran most to Stillington, Hester did, sir," said he with an explanatory slap on the mare's caked shoulder. "And me thinking to catch her in a furlong or less, I thought the lady's message could wait. You see a real runaway was not in the lady's plan, sir, nor in mine, you may be sure."

"'The lady's plan'?" ejaculated the bishop weakly.

The postboy nodded.

"I was but to rattle down the hill and along the next few miles to keep this gentleman occupied, as you might say, while the lady stole off, sir," he explained with a grin between impudence and sheepishness. "Give me two pound ten to do it, too, sir, and to give this gentleman here the message, which, so help me, I ain't done yet."

"What was the message?" Berenger asked very quietly.

"To tell my gentleman — meaning you, sir — that you could look to receive your money — meaning what she give me, sir — to a captain in the army, and a lord he was into the bargain, Captain Lord Rufus Ainte-Cante — no, sir, Montacute, it was, sir; for he was her husband and she was going to him then."

"Ah," breathed the bishop, and like one man they turned to look into the enclosure. But save for the crimson-lined cloak lying beside the spring no trace of the bride and bridegroom was to be seen. Next

moment, however, whispers and the chink of money came from behind one of the two great columns.

Berenger caught the bishop by the arm and hurried him back along the path toward Coxwold, driving Sterne, the chaplain, the postboy, and even the postboy's horse before him in his eagerness to escape. Not till they had scaled the slope would he allow them to halt. Then: —

"That money," he panted. "I don't think I could have stood his returning it to me just then."

Sterne observed him with a grin.

"You 'd better take Hester here and ride post to York if you want to escape it," he advised. "I warrant you they 'll be up at Shandy Hall, borrowing my carriage to take them to *madame mère*, in half an hour.

"So, your lordship," he added, turning to the bishop, "if your business with the Archbishop is still as pressing as it was last night, you had best make off with the vehicle before this young son of Anak steals it from you."

There was a sly glint in his eye, and he had saved plenty of emphasis for the last word, but my lord Bishop of Sodor and Man ignored the thrust. The genial freshness of the morning had performed something of its miracle on him; he was hardly recognizable now as the desolate old man among the tombs an hour before. Also, he had not reached the exalted position which he occupied without learning that when a change of front becomes advisable it is well to execute the manœuvre with precision and thoroughness.

"On the contrary, sir," he rumbled melodiously. "I feel myself under a certain obligation to be among the first to felicitate the new Lady Montacute. Should I be abusing your hospitality, Mr. Sterne, if I remained to breakfast with you?"

Curtain

A DISH FOR A DUKE

"Sa jalousie paternelle s'avertissait. Il avait . . . cette affection trouble et pure, que bien des pères éprouvent pour leurs filles . . . il l'aimait ainsi, coquette, romanesque. . . . Mais quand il vit que l'aventure menacait de devenir plus sérieuse, il s'inquieta."

La Fin du Voyage: Les Amies.

A DISH FOR A DUKE

I A Pale Man, with Spider Legs, Clad in Black

II Viva la Joia!

III Jackal's Meat

IV Le Parson Yorick s'Amuse

V The Troubles of a Ravisher

VI Smoking Flax

CHAPTER I

A PALE MAN, WITH SPIDER LEGS, CLAD IN BLACK

"Qui le diable est cet homme-là, said Choiseul t' other day, ce Chevalier Shandy?"

STERNE, *Letter XXII.*

THE words would have attracted the attention of the English traveler, had they been spoken in the breathy French of the South that rose all around him. In his native tongue, they made him raise his drooping head and listen in frank astonishment, for it was his rooted conviction that Englishmen do not express such thoughts, at least when sober.

"A dish for a duke, sir — to judge from your description of her charms."

The little terrace where he sat was filled with its late-afternoon crowd of regular customers, muleteers, and postilions, lounging over bronze wine-cups on the stone benches, and a scattering of gentlemen, with bottles and glasses on the rustic tables before them, who had evidently been unable to pass this auberge at the Porte St.-Lazare without washing from their throats the dust of the Lyons road. But these last were so few that the traveler had no difficulty in picking out the speaker of the words which had aroused his interest.

The arched black eyebrows, the indolent insolence of the black, predacious eyes, the arrogant nose, the slightly contemptuous twist of the sensual lips, all matched perfectly with the tone in which the words had been uttered. In England the traveler would have put the man down as some great personage playing clumsily with an incognito in his oldest clothes. His wig was faultless, the hilt of his small-sword ivory and silver; and the domineering power of his face and bearing were accentuated rather than diminished by such indications of genteel poverty as the clever darn in the Malines lace at his muscular throat and the frayed edge of the waistcoat of rich brocade that strained from the gilt buttons on his jutting chest. But in France things had to be judged differently. The traveler had already written home, "In this country nothing is spared for the back, though you dine on an onion and lie in a garret seven stories high." Moreover, the man was English. His hard, heavy cheeks, impurpled with a fine network of distended veins, made that certain, if his tongue had not. One of the numerous exiles, English, Irish, and Scotch, whom the ruin of the Stuart cause had left stranded and half destitute all over Europe, most likely. He looked more than old enough to have been out twenty years ago in the Forty-five, — over fifty rather than under, indeed, — but vigorous, in the height of physical condition, and still greedy for the treasures of the world and the flesh of which fate had so far cheated him. His companion, a singularly handsome youth of twenty-

four, in the uniform of a lieutenant in the Irish regiment of Berwick in the French royal service, fitted into this hypothesis to a nicety.

The traveler read the young man's facings and insignia of rank as easily as, to judge from the clerical black of his coat and breeches, he would have recognized the apron of a bishop or the gaiters of a dean. A boyhood about the barracks of his father's company in one of His Britannic Majesty's marching regiments had grounded him in such matters; and the sight of the gallant youth murmuring a deferential reply to the amused insolence of this needy adventurer affronted his inherited sense of what was fitting in an officer and a gentleman.

Satisfied that the lowered tones of the pair would prevent his hearing any sequel of the remark which had aroused him from a lethargy of weakness and fatigue, he called the waiter, whose spotted apron over leather breeches proclaimed him minister to man and beast alike, and over a glass of mild St.-Tropez generously watered against the heating effects of travel and such weather as the oldest inhabitant of France could not remember, appeared to lose himself in unhappy reflections.

Presently, with an air of determination, he drew a battered notebook from his pocket and flashed the glance of his dark eyes about him. Shadows of the trellised vine overhead dappled the rich mixture of humanity that hemmed him in. At the end of a short, dim tunnel of eucalyptus and pepper trees, drooping under their burden of white dust, a soldier

in the gaudy uniform of the papal infantry lounged on his halberd beneath the crossed keys and triple crown carven above the city gate. The traveler had an Uncle Toby who was seldom absent from his thoughts, who would have taken a professional interest in that unbuttoned sentinel. A certain Captain Shandy, invalided out of the service by a wound in the groin, his opinion should have been worth having as to how long the siege-train which followed the Duke of Marlborough in Flanders would have required to batter down that barbican or breach the enormous machicolated walls of the palace of the Popes, whose shadow darkened the farther end of the street. But the pencil remained poised; the look of animation died on the traveler's face.

Only when the arch reëchoed the rumble of wheels on the drawbridge did his interest quicken. Then an expression humorously apprehensive would light his eyes and give its queer quirk to the wrinkles about his mouth; and once, when the vehicle proved to be a post chaise with two ladies in it, he half rose on his thin legs, a flush of eagerness staining the transparent pallor of his cheeks. But the chaise rolled past, and he sank back into his chair as if even so slight a movement had exhausted him.

Of the gay excitement with which he had rushed aboard the boat at Lyons yesterday he searched his mind vainly for a trace. It had vanished three hours ago as he climbed the steep street from the landing-place and saw his portmanteau dumped on the hot flagstones of the courtyard of the Hôtel de l'Univers.

The thought of seeing the sights of Avignon, as described in Piganiol de la Force's "*Nouveau voyage de la France*" had become like dust and ashes in the mouth. But he had driven himself through the breathless streets of the baking city, guidebook in hand, till that utter prostration of all his powers, of which he had lately had more than one dreadful experience, had scared him into the shelter of this humble drinking-place.

It afforded him one advantage, at least, he strove to comfort himself. If his wife persisted in her determination to travel by chaise, she and his daughter must enter Avignon by this gate, and he would be on hand to welcome and assist them. But a moment's reflection convinced him that she would not. It was absurd to waste so much as a glance at the dust-whitened chaises as they rumbled in. Having got her way, she would never forego the additional advantage over him which she would gain by refusing to avail herself of the fruits of her victory. She would have waited over until to-day and taken the boat as he had done yesterday. Had she dared subject her daughter's delicate constitution to the discomforts of such a vehicle in such heat, she would probably have come on by the diligence, in order to score off him more heavily still. She had been angry enough.

The details of their quarrel over the relative merits of road and river crowded back into his mind. The bitterer for being the first since she and Lydia had joined him in France, it had been only the latest of

many; and it had ended exactly like its predecessors, in volleys of fleering badinage from him, and on her side in a stony, uncompromising silence from which his gibes rebounded, pointless. She had gone off to show Lydia the Tomb of the Lovers and the famous clock of Lippius of Bâle — though he had assured her that the one no longer existed and the other no longer ran. And he, bruised in spirit and dazzled by the thought that at any rate he was now free to enjoy another forty-eight hours of the freedom that had been his in Paris from January to May, had tossed his luggage on board the boat which left for Avignon at noon.

Freedom? Fatigue and weakness mocked the memory of the mood. Freedom for what? Pretty grisettes with milliners' boxes tucked under shapely forearms, and ankles that made a man's heart skip a beat at the sight of them? Beautiful shopkeepers' wives with complaisant husbands and pulses that throbbed quick and quicker beneath one's tingling finger-tips? He had n't enough spirit left to ask his way of a rheumatic washerwoman! As for the deep-breasted goddesses, in lofty headdresses and floating fringe, that glided by the terrace from time to time as if their slender feet disdained the pavement, their broad brows and dark eyes looked as if they would have small patience for the sentimental harmonics a lacklustre, spider-legged scarecrow might love to pluck from sympathetic heartstrings.

His letters of introduction? The society of worldly-wise ecclesiastics which they would open to

him, and of whose rich raciness he had a glimpse at Paris, had been what appealed to him most when the idea of rushing off alone had flashed into his head. But he felt too weary, too sick, to make the necessary effort. Why could he never remember, until this dreadful weakness struck him down like a blow, that he was an invalid traveling in search of health? And if he had been himself, — himself of nine days out of ten, at least, — he ought to have known better than to be so easily beguiled by such a prospect. Had n't he already discovered that, while a distinguished traveler with a wife and daughter in England fits in everywhere, the same man, accompanied by those dear encumbrances, trails to the eye of a prospective host a net of unknown amplitude and complexity? Having them but twenty-four hours behind him would not greatly change things. A clergyman with a wife seemed queer enough in this country, anyhow. And how explain his coming on ahead?

His imagination mocked his loneliness with a picture of his wife and daughter as they probably were at that moment, under the awning at the stern of the Lyons boat. The villainous parti-colored tea service they had picked up in Paris would be out of the straw of its hamper, the bronze teapot exhaling a fragrant cloud; and he saw Lydia's piquant profile tilted above a cup of the pale golden elixir for a taste of which just then he would have traded all the wine of Languedoc. The vision sharpened the contrast between the evening hours ahead of him and the

memory of Paris nights last winter and in the early spring, at the opera, at the Embassy, in the salon of the Duc de Choiseul.

Upon these dismal meditations broke in the scrape of chairs and the voice of the young Irishman, raised to dispute the score and hushed at a growl from his companion. The pair stepped past his table and paused on the edge of the terrace to exchange their farewells.

"The finest woman in the world is n't worth missing a good supper for," the elder persuaded jovially, with a glance at the sun, whose last fiery beams shot between the battlements of the barbican.

"And affords the greater enjoyment afterward," the other agreed, with a loud laugh. "To be sure, a bride is another matter. But she will not come now — not until to-morrow, I 'd be sworn. So pray do me the honor to inform your exalted master that I will wait upon him the moment I have made my appearance suitable to the distinction he confers upon me."

"Bravo, my cock!" cried the older man, and clapped him on the shoulder. "But what if your wondrous light-o'-love should arrive between this and eight o'clock? What will you do then?"

"Lock her in her room, and leave the key with her waiting-woman, whom I own, body and soul."

The other laughed approvingly, but with less of boisterousness in his tone, and it seemed to the traveler that his next words had not quite the ring of pleasantry which he tried to give them.

"Mon dieu! Such assurance deserves to be punished," he exclaimed in French. "To pay you for it I will loiter here for another half hour on the chance that she may come even yet. Should I fail to put in an appearance at supper, rub your forehead and thank the good God that horns don't grow till after marriage."

"I defy you. Do your worst!" the youth retorted in triumphant good humor, and with an exaggeration of the military salute he swaggered away.

The traveler followed him with an indulgent smile in his dark eyes. The boy had drunk too much wine, had not borne himself quite as a gentleman should; but in his flushed handsome face, the lithe strength of his slim body, in his confidence and his pagan joy in the beauty of his sweetheart and his power over her, there was that which appealed irresistibly to this man, whose love affairs years and sickness had relegated almost completely to his imagination. When he withdrew his gaze it was to encounter that of the young man's late companion. A shade of contempt lingered in the arrogant eyes, but vanished in a look of interest as their glances met; and the traveler was an instant too late in returning to the consideration of his wineglass, if he wished to avoid being addressed.

"Pray pardon the liberty, sir," came the veiled brutality of the voice, "but are you not recently out of England? An English clergyman, I would hazard."

The traveler arose and made a careful replica of the other's measured bow.

"And you, sir, I venture to take for an English gentleman some years resident on the Continent."

The other caught his lower lip under two big white teeth, as if for a second he would have resented the tone which neither affirmed nor denied his supposition. Then he said, smiling: —

"I am known as Sain'terre in France. In Italy, thanks to the gracious pleasure of the Holy Father, Marquis of Terra Santa."

"*In partibus*, I take it," commented the traveler, bowing gravely for the second time, but with an impish glint in his urbanity.

At this jest upon his title by a perfect stranger, the brow of the marquis blackened and a contortion well-nigh demoniacal deformed his nose and upper lip. At Rome he had spent years enough hanging about the dismal little court of the Pretender who styled himself James III, by the grace of God King of Great Britain, to learn that certain prelates, called bishops *in partibus infidelium*, were decorated with the names of sees in which they would never have dared to show their heads; and the knowledge barbed the gibe.

To all appearance unmoved by this alarming transformation, however, the traveler went on courteously: —

"Pray forgive the silly jest. I assure you it was meant for no more. A wretched, incurable habit of mine, which you will the more easily forgive, perhaps, when I introduce myself as Parson Yorick, better known in Paris as the Chevalier Shandy."

But the eagerness with which he scanned the scowling face of the marquis for some sign of recognition of either name went unrewarded by the faintest gleam. Right foot thrust forward, left hand gripping his scabbard just below the sword hilt, the nobleman maintained his threatening attitude.

"I am not much *au courant* in Paris of late," he sneered. "If your title of chevalier means anything, I'll have your blood for that insult. If you are a parson indeed, I'll box your ears for a misbegotten boor. Let your cowardice dictate your reply."

"I am the Reverend Laurence Sterne, Vicar of Coxwold in Yorkshire and one of the prebendaries of York Cathedral, Monsieur le Marquis," the traveler replied, assuming a new air of dignity as he spoke. "Certain silly books by which I have striven to turn my weakness for jesting to some useful account are responsible for these other names which I am often known by."

The change in the countenance and manner of the Marquis de Sain'terre was as instantaneous and complete as it was amazing.

"My dear sir," he exclaimed in tones of excessive cordiality, "if you will permit the freedom! I cannot say I ever hoped as much, for I addressed you on the off chance, because it was my duty to let no possibility escape me. But we were led to expect a clergyman accompanied by his family, and —"

"Expect?" Mr. Sterne interrupted.

At his obvious bewilderment the marquis again changed his tone.

"Did I not understand you to say that you were the Reverend Laurence Sterne?" he asked.

"You did — I am," the clergyman answered with marked reserve.

"Of Coxwold in Yorkshire?"

"Precisely."

"And a prebendary of York Cathedral?"

"The same."

"Your wife and daughter arrived with you at Avignon to-day, did they not?"

"No. They did not accompany me to-day." There was a polished frigidity in the way in which the words were spoken, but it appeared to be lost on the Marquis de Sain'terre. He grew cordial again.

"Then I think we have a mutual friend in Mr. Lawson Trotter, for some years past resident in Paris, but formerly of Skelton Castle in Yorkshire."

"I know his nephew, the present master of Skelton," the clergyman admitted, "and I had the honor of meeting Mr. Lawson Trotter in Paris."

"And did he not chance to mention the name of the Marquis de Sain'terre?"

"I cannot recall that he did, Monsieur le Marquis."

"I am — perhaps I should say that I was — Sir John Rumbold of Cloisters in Northumberland." The marquis had the air of one trying to keep his patience with a rather stupid child.

"It desolates me," returned the clergyman, shifting to French as if English were incapable of expressing the degree of insincerity with which he spoke, "but

I cannot recall that Mr. Lawson Trotter mentioned the fact. And as this catechism seems likely to be prolonged, Sir John, perhaps you will forgive me if I sit down. It is ill health that has forced me to travel, and I find myself greatly fatigued by my journey and the heat."

The deadly pallor of his face should have excused his incontinently suiting the action to the words. But as these neither contained nor implied any suggestion that the marquis do likewise, the big upper teeth of the latter nipped his lower lip, and before he was ready to speak again Mr. Sterne had called the waiter to him, and, upon learning that the house could supply an omelet, cold fowl, and bread, proceeded to order his supper.

"I find that food often revives me at times like this," he explained negligently, as if it were the most natural thing in the world for a marquis of the States of the Church to remain standing before him while he sat at his ease.

"My master, the Comte d'Albanie," began the nobleman, — or so Mr. Sterne understood him, for the marquis also had changed to French, — "is stopping at the Hôtel de l'Univers. Mr. Lawson Trotter will have mentioned him at least, I think."

But the invalid's tired face retained its expression of perfunctory attention only.

"Le Comte d'Albanie? I think not. D'Albanie and a count?" His eyes brightened. "One would have expected a Hospodar d'Albanie at the least. Your Comte d'Albanie must, like yourself, be so *in*

partibus only — oh, very much *in partibus*, I should say."

Apparently the marquis had by this time determined to make himself agreeable at all costs, for to Mr. Sterne's surprise he burst into a roar of laughter.

"By Bacchus, excellent!" he shouted. "Le Comte d'Albanie *in partibus infidelium!* He will relish that. You yourself shall tell him." And, quite carried away by his amusement, he fell back a stride or two from the edge of the low terrace into the narrow street, still laughing.

"Have a care, sir!" Sterne cried sharply. But he spoke too late. The marquis collided with a woman passer-by, very nearly knocking her off her feet. He turned at the impact, but without the least concern at the sight of the slender form staggering to maintain its equilibrium.

"If you get off as good a thing as that very often, Mr. Sterne, I must buy your books — I must, by Bacchus!" he gasped.

"You very nearly knocked that young lady down," Sterne remonstrated, outraged in all his sensibilities, and, pushing brusquely past him, he sprang to offer his assistance.

He had seen at a glance that the victim of the marquis's brutality was a young person of a certain rank. The cloak and veil, worn in spite of the heat, the carriage of the head, and the tender lines of her figure which the light draperies only partly succeeded in concealing, made that plain, while a handsome girl of twenty-five, in the street dress of a

waiting-woman, who ran forward to pick up the gold-and-velvet reticule which had slipped from her mistress's hand, confirmed it. Behind them the wreck of a post chaise, heaped together with some small luggage on a country cart, with a postilion trudging at its tail, accounted for her presence on foot at such a place and hour.

The recovery of the reticule left Sterne without an excuse for offering succor. For a moment, however, he continued to stand still in the street. If he did not master his indignation before he returned to the marquis, he felt that it would burst out in a scene whose consequences might be serious for a foreigner newly arrived, as he was, in a strange city. Suppose his sweet Lydia had been the victim of such brutal unconcern! And in that moment the first gust of the evening wind swept through the gate with all the fury for which Avignon is famous. The drooping branches of the eucalyptus tossed into life; the pellets of the pepper trees pattered like a sharp shower of rain; dust and straws danced in giddy funnels over the pavement. The cloak of the distressed young lady was moulded to the springing outlines of her slender form and blown back to disclose the beauty of her young breast. Her veil flew free in the blast. But it was less the flushed loveliness of her haggard features than their look of brooding passion, a look that approached the intensity of self-dedication, which was stamped on his memory in the instant before a small whirlwind blinded and choked him.

Dust filled his mouth and nostrils, constricted his throat. He felt his way back to the terrace, sank into his chair, and, clinging to the table, coughed as if he would give up life itself in the paroxysm. With a solicitude hard to account for in one whose indifference to the misfortunes of others had so lately been demonstrated, the marquis hung over him, called for water, would have beaten him on the back, had not a feeble gesture forbidden it. Indeed, the nobleman's anxiety seemed hardly less than Sterne's own when the latter lowered the handkerchief he had been pressing to his lips and reluctantly forced himself to examine its folds.

"I never know when my bellows may burst in a fit like that," he explained, smiling up in relief from the unsullied cambric. "I bled the bed full at Paris a month back — what the faculty there call a *défluxion poitrine* — and that was not the first time."

The marquis expressed the proper amount of concern at this information, and added that Mr. Lawson Trotter had written that Mr. Sterne was not in the enjoyment of the best of health. At the reappearance of Mr. Trotter's name in the conversation, Sterne's fine eyebrows drew together, but otherwise he ignored it, saying only that he believed the winter in Toulouse would completely restore his health, and asking if the marquis had not heard the climate of that city highly recommended for persons suffering from his complaint. The marquis replied absently that he had heard it so recommended.

"By the way, may I trouble you to tell me the

time?" he asked, his big hand with its thick growth of black hairs on the back of it slipping smoothly away from the empty fob whither it had gone with the movement of long habit. "I was compelled to leave my watch with the horologer this morning for some necessary repairs."

Sterne shifted to his left hand a smelling-bottle, from which now and again he had been inhaling deeply since his coughing spell, and glanced at a gold repeater emblazoned with a crest.

"It lacks five minutes of seven."

"And my master sups at eight," the marquis returned briskly. "His orders, Mr. Sterne, were that when I had found you I was to bring you to sup with him."

"I cannot express my appreciation of the honor." Sterne rose and bowed with a complete resumption of the distant civility he had used earlier in the interview. "Will you be so good as to tell him so when you inform him that I had ordered my supper here before I received his invitation?"

The marquis sprang to his feet, and anger rang an undertone to his attempt at amused impatience.

"Either you are the most discreet man in the world, sir, or the stupidest; and I am quite sure you are not the latter."

"The whole world — or that small part of it that has ever heard of me — will assure you that I am the reverse of the former," Sterne smiled.

At this moment the waiter approached to indicate that the traveler's repast was served at a little table

where an angle of the wall protected it from the violent gusts which occasionally raided the terrace. The marquis bowed.

"You will take your own time, I see," he observed, the smooth tones of his heavy voice so much more ominous than their loudest bluster. "My master is generally accessible till after supper, and to you he must needs be so at any hour. But I warn you, his years of hope deferred have not taught him patience. He is not to be trifled with with impunity — even *in partibus*," he ended with a sneer.

The clergyman had risen at the waiter's summons. He bowed in turn.

"I deplore my stupidity," he replied. "But, having no other light, I can only say that if your master takes the slightest interest in my existence he must be even a greater fool than I am. But stay," he added, as the marquis with a shrug of contemptuous incredulity was swinging on his heel. "This Lawson Trotter — is he by chance a practical joker? His nephew is sadly given that way, I know to my sorrow."

"I 'll have done with you, sir, at least for the present," the marquis flung over his shoulder savagely.

"Bravo, Yorick!" Sterne murmured to himself, as he watched the tall form stride away down the street. "Once you might have walked into the trap of that gentleman-cutthroat for the mere fun of the thing. Can it be that you have learned discretion at last, or is it only that this infernal weakness has left you without the enterprise of a slug?"

Nevertheless, had he felt equal to it, it would have been amusing to play the dupe for a while, he ruminated. How clever such rascals were! To bait their gin for him with the name of little, ineffectual Lawson Trotter, and to have all his own titles and offices so pat. The implication that he was some sort of messenger from Trotter had been a bit stupid, to be sure. But how could this "Sain'terre" have known that his wife and daughter might have been expected to arrive here with him? Could he have picked that up at the Hôtel de l'Univers? He had written to engage rooms, of course; and the fellow seemed to be stopping there. At least it was thither that he had bidden the young Irishman to sup with his precious "master," le Comte d'Albanie. Why, clever as they were, could these adventurers never resist the temptation to assume titles that fairly shrieked "charlatan!" from the housetops? Marquis of the Holy Land — Count of Albania! Still, in French —

Halfway to his table, Sterne stopped and slapped his thigh with his open hand, while his mouth widened in a soundless laugh at the element of comedy in the situation, which he had just recognized for the first time. Comte d'Albanie? Yes, each time either he or the marquis had pronounced the name it had been in a French sentence and had got a French twist from its surroundings. But it was n't Albania — it was Albany, it stood for. Count of Albany! He had heard it talked of in Paris, the latest title chosen for his enforced incognito by Charles Edward, the

Young Pretender. That was it for a certainty. He ran swiftly over his memory of the conversation. Every detail fitted in; every outside circumstance harmonized. Sain'terre's amusement over the labored jest of *in partibus infidelium*, when applied to his master, was explained, the inhabitants of no regions being more unfaithful than those of England were to the Stuarts. Lawson Trotter's name was accounted for, and the supposition that Sterne was his messenger. It was an open secret that the ineffectual, retiring little man was some sort of agent for the Stuart cause in Paris; and Sterne had been so complaisant as to smuggle out of England certain moneys for him from his nephew. Emboldened by this, Trotter had doubtless planned to use him in his correspondence with the prince, till better acquaintance had made the busy little intriguer change his mind. No wonder Sain'terre had first chafed at Sterne's supposed caution, and then waxed furious at being treated like a gentlemanly blackleg!

Sterne sat down to the table with a sharp feeling of regret. Why had n't he guessed it before? Could he but have gone to that supper! The thought of the situation appealed to all that was impish in him. He, who owed his first preferment in the Church to his zeal for King George II when Bonnie Prince Charlie and his wild Highlanders were within a hundred miles of London, would have been received with the princely favor due a trusted emissary. And he would have dearly loved to see the prince, bonnie no longer, no longer young, but slipping into dis-

honorable middle age between a brandy bottle and a trollopy mistress, the world said. What would he be doing at Avignon, whence the Pope had once been compelled to thrust him out by the threat of having English guns bombard Civitá Vecchia? Would his Walkinshaw be with him, his Clementina, the reputed squalor of whose life obscured even the bright beam of her devotion?

Well, even if she were not, it was no fit company for a family man. And since the Count of Albany also seemed to be stopping at the Hôtel de l'Univers, it was a good thing that his miserable weakness had ended matters where it had. Lydia and her mother would arrive next day, and he could n't have that great brute of a Sain'terre estimating the charms of his pretty daughter as worthy of a ducal appetite.

CHAPTER II

VIVA LA JOIA!

"Hadst thou, Nannette, been array'd like a dutchesse!
— But that cursed slit in thy petticoat!"

Tristram Shandy.

STERNE had ordered his meal without much hope that it would prove more than barely edible in so humble a tavern, and only because he felt himself unequal to the walk back to his hotel without some nourishment. But — such miracles are always happening in France — the omelet was hot and of a celestial lightness, the cold chicken tender and succulent, the salad crisp, and the bottle of Chateauneuf du Pape, with which at the first bite he determined to honor the repast, was of exactly the temperature to cool the throat without cheating the palate of the nicest appreciation of its flavor. He had a dewy *fromage de l'Evêque* to go with the last of it. Overhead the vine leaves fluttered in the wind; down the street someone began to pluck throbbing chords from the strings of a deep-toned instrument, to which the low steady clash of footfalls on the cobblestones, as more and more of the inhabitants of the quarter turned out to breathe the evening cool, made a soothing undertone.

Strengthened and exhilarated by the food and wine,

the stem of a generous glass of the liqueur of the Benedictine brethren between his long white fingers, he began to recall the sights and happenings of the last twenty-four hours with something of the spirit with which he had set out from Lyons: the gay, pink-and-white towns in their dusty greenery, past which the arrowy Rhone had swept his boat; behind them the mountains, a shimmering whitish blue through the heat; faces that laughed down from a parapet as the boat shot through the echoing dimness of a bridge; lithe shapes of women at a riverbank *lavoir;* the architectural fantasy of St. Benezet's bridge, ending in the air; scents of olive yard and oranges, of oil and wine, river mud, dust, and baking stone streets; chance-heard phrases, single words, musical or charged with a wealth of implication; the sacerdotal visage of the Swiss at his hotel; the handsome, reckless face of the young Irish officer, flushed with wine and his glory in the beauty and passion of his mistress, that "dish for a duke," in the ironical phrase of the Marquis de Sain'terre.

The Reverend Laurence Sterne, Vicar of Coxwold, Prebendary of York Cathedral, gave utterance to a sigh. Why was n't the world so made that the philosophy summed up in that phrase would suffice a man? Or why then was it so made that the opposite served him no better, that the monk in his cloister was even less a whole man than the pagan at his banquet? Why must there always be war in his members? He was about to tell himself, as he had done a score of times already, and on a score of other

points, that they managed these things better here in France, that here at least a man was expected to take things in turn as his years fitted him for them, when the persistent mental picture of that scapegrace lieutenant of Berwick's brought his mind back to the occurrences of the afternoon. Until, between boredom and bravado, the young Adonis had forsaken his vigil, he had been expecting the arrival of his Dulcinea by yonder gate, had he not? Could it be that the young lady of the passionate countenance and the dropped reticule, of the handsome femme de chambre and the wrecked post chaise, was she?

Suddenly and sharply he hoped not: there had been so much more than a suggestion of precocity in the rounded outlines of her slender form, as if the body's growth had outstripped the mind's and, for the time, had mastered it. One often saw the same thing in gently nurtured girls at home. He recalled the childish curve of her cheek. Why, she might well be younger than his own dear Lyd! And over here the children seemed to be born with more knowledge of the matters of the heart than most English acquired in a long lifetime. One would never see a like preoccupation in passion on a lovely young English face. She had pressed on, totally unaware of having been almost knocked off her feet by an insolent, laughing satyr, and had received her reticule again from the hand of her maid like a person walking in her sleep.

A sly baggage, that maid, with a glance which, for all the blowing dust, had missed neither his own

checked rush of assistance nor the appraising stare of the marquis! Just the sort to sell out her employer, as the young Irishman's boast had implied. And how else could a young girl of good family and fortune escape from her guardians so completely as to be able to prosecute what must have been a considerable journey to meet her lover?

His next thought brought him bolt upright on his chair. Had the marquis guessed the young lady's identity? Was the sinister brute even now employing the hour at his disposal in an attempt to carry out that jesting threat of his in answer to the young lover's boast of complete security? It had n't sounded like a mere jest, he remembered thinking at the time. He tried to remember whether he had seen the marquis disappear down the narrow length of the street as he would have done if he had gone directly to the Hôtel de l'Univers. Instinctively he craned his neck to see by what turnings the man could have left the principal thoroughfare, and he was rewarded by the sight of the handsome femme de chambre.

She approached rapidly through the strolling crowd, quite indifferent to the fact that through a rent in her petticoat — got doubtless in the wreck of the chaise — one well-turned leg flashed as high as the knee at every step. Sterne's heart was pumping the warmth of generous wine through his veins; he gazed with frank delight at that to which, at another time and place, he would have given only sly peepings under the pretense of scanning the crowd; and

that part of his mind which seemed ever to keep itself withdrawn, watching all that he did and felt, observed how different were the thoughts attending this open scrutiny from those which came with spying. Could he but put into his next *Shandy* that masterly detail of the Creator's sculpture as he saw it now, and not have to rest satisfied to get what fun he could out of setting it down with the lecherous smirk his public would expect of him!

With a start he became aware that the eyes of the waiting-woman had ceased to rove among the faces of the passers-by and, having raked the few remaining occupants of the little terrace with their hardy glance, had fixed themselves upon him, while she made straight for his sheltered corner.

"Monsieur will permit me to ask him one little question?" she inquired, sketching a courtesy as she stopped before his table.

Like most men who are intensely sensitive to beauty, he was never quite at his ease in the presence of those who possessed it. He rose and bowed.

"With all my heart, mademoiselle. It would be a pleasure to do mademoiselle a greater service."

An English servant would have found the words and action either contemptible or ironical, but this French girl was quick to sense the feeling behind them.

"Monsieur is too good," she replied with a flash of perfect teeth. "I wish to know, has monsieur by chance seen anything of an Irish officer of the regiment of Berwick?"

The wish to keep her before him while he admired

the splendid health that stained her cheeks and informed the firm contours of her whole person prompted his reply.

"There are many officers in the regiment of Berwick," he smiled. "But, if mademoiselle will honor me by sitting down and taking some mild restorative after her quest, we will run through the roster."

She accepted the invitation, not only without demur, but with what delighted him, an air of its being the most natural thing in the world. It had always galled him that at home any unusual advance from a man to a woman was taken *à outrance.*

"It might simplify the search," he went on, when the waiter had set before her the glass of sweet Frontignan for which she had gracefully signified her preference, "if one knew whether mademoiselle inquired on her own behalf or on that of her young mistress."

"Oh, on hers, naturally. Monsieur is too polite!"

"Believe me, monsieur is not. But, since the young lady is our concern, I take it we may eliminate the colonel of Berwick's, the lieutenant-colonel, and the major, for at her age she will hardly have acquired the discrimination to prefer reputation and experience to youth and beauty. Coming to the captains, then —"

"We may skip the captains too, monsieur," interrupted the girl, though she smiled with amused indulgence at his foolery. "It is the Lieutenant Donat O'Hara that I seek. And since I take monsieur to be English — "

"Irish, one half of me, though I have n't the honor of knowing your gentleman. But tell me: is he young and handsome?"

"To a degree."

"And perhaps a little too much given to wine and boasting of his conquests?"

"If he were not of the military, — and I will not say, of his race, since it is in part monsieur's as well, — it might be thought so."

"And he was expecting mademoiselle and her mistress with such impatience as, having seen them both, I can understand?"

"Ah, monsieur will believe as much when I tell him that it is a runaway marriage they intend. All was arranged to take place at half past eleven this morning at the church of St. Gregoire round the corner. But for the never sufficiently to be lamented wreck of the chaise, Monsieur O'Hara would now be the husband of the richest heiress in France. And all had gone so well! The good nuns were without the slightest suspicion — my mistress was one of their pupils, monsieur will understand, not a novice. No one could guess our direction. And now —"

"I think," Sterne broke in upon her lament, "that the young man was sitting in this very place, hoping for the young lady's arrival, until only a few minutes before you and your mistress came through yonder gate. But be of good cheer," he added, and could not resist stretching his hand across the table to give hers a reassuring pat as she uttered an exclamation of distress at the lovers' having missed each other so

narrowly. "I know where he can be found within the hour. He sups at eight with the Marquis de Sain'terre. I heard him promise, and —"

"The Marquis de Sain'terre?" she took him up. "Is he a handsome gentleman, very big and fine, with a grand air?"

"You know him then?"

"He accosted me a half hour ago, as I was setting out to search for Monsieur O'Hara as my mistress bade me. He begged for her name and the place of her lodging, that he might wait upon her with his apologies for his rudeness here at the gate — a thing which, I believe, monsieur was witness of."

As if absent-mindedly, she turned her hand beneath his caress, and her fingers clasped his in an embrace soft and firm. Ah, ah, my girl, he thought; so you left that delicious child to receive that ruthless satyr alone in an inn, and you'd like to distract me from thinking about it. Now whose interest did you conceive yourself to be serving when you did that? Not hers, nor the confident Mr. O'Hara's, for a certainty. Were you merely earning a little bribe from monsieur le marquis, or does that young Adonis own your heart as well as the body and soul he boasted of? Would you gladly see a successful rival to him with your mistress? Aloud he said: —

"I am glad to hear that the marquis manifested some contrition for his clumsiness, even so tardily. But were I monsieur le lieutenant, I should not be easy at the thought of my fiancée alone with that man."

The femme de chambre shrugged with scornful grace.

"He will be able to make as much impression upon her as upon a marble Venus. You, monsieur, are one who use your eyes. You saw her face here an hour ago. Do you think that, short of force —"

"Mademoiselle, on the other hand, fails even to sympathize with the infatuation?" Sterne interjected with gentle irony.

A wave of color flushed the girl's forehead and stained her throat and breast where the square opening of her bodice left it bare. There was no coquetry in the grip of her fingers now; and into her eyes came a look of bleakness, a hateful look, that lingered even through her attempt at a laugh of good-natured confusion.

"Oh, he has all the charm and beauty of a devil, that O'Hara. But when I am not with him, I can see that there are other men in the world, at least," she added with a killing glance.

"What I have difficulty in understanding," said Sterne, feeling rather ashamed of himself, but unable to resist the temptation to probe deeper, "is how, having known mademoiselle, the gentleman in question ever became aware that there were other women in the world."

But her guard was up again now. She put the flattery aside and answered with that ruthless Gallic clarity which the Anglo-Saxon will never cease to wonder at.

"When a man has had all that a woman can give

him — Besides, I 've no doubt he thinks, that paragon of vanity, that in marrying my lady her maid —" She let the shrug of her race and station complete the sentence.

Sterne shrugged in turn if not in kind. He earnestly desired to follow this interesting episode with the detachment of the artist and observer of the ways of men, but as its squalid and sordid details began to be revealed, he found that he had to combat that impulse to thank God that his race were not as other men were, which he believed to be one of the worst of their faults.

"Well," he said somewhat drily, "at all events it is indeed the Marquis de Sain'terre with whom Lieutenant O'Hara is supping within the hour. You have but to go to the Hôtel de l'Univers, and at five minutes to eight I warrant you will see him enter the courtyard."

But it appeared that the femme de chambre knew nothing of Avignon. She had never been there before; and now that dusk was deepening, she doubted her ability even to find her way back to her mistress's lodging at the humble *auberge* of All the Angels, let alone groping through the crooked streets to a hotel she had never seen. The mere prospect seemed to poise her on the edge of such a crisis of the nerves that Sterne felt constrained to clasp her warm hand closely in one of his and stroke it with the other, counseling her to drink the remainder of her wine, and promising to see her safe to the accomplishment of her errand.

His reward was a gentle squeeze of the fingers and a look which promised so much more at the proper time and place that his head grew quite giddy as they sallied out into the street and her round arm drew his bony one against her firm breast as if she received comfort and reassurance from feeling it there. The street proved to be ill lighted and, in the long stretches between the high blank walls, worse paved. Hidden inequalities were continually tripping one or other of them and throwing them against each other; and the brim of her wide straw hat kept poking his head or scraping his ear, till in pity she insisted on stopping to take it off, with a fine, free gesture of uplifted arms, inimitably feminine, which displayed her splendid torso against the light of a distant street-lamp. After that, though he had noted that she wore a lace cap under her hat, this must have become disarranged, for tendrils of her hair brushed his cheek at every stumbling step, tempting him, almost beyond endurance, to a hundred indiscretions.

It was only the ridiculous sight of their blended shadows, thrown with grotesque exaggeration on the opposite wall by a lantern over some important postern of the palace of the Popes, that steadied him sufficiently to carry out the plan which he had formed before leaving the terrace; and he drew a breath of honest relief when, after announcing that he had lost his way and wandering for ten minutes in a hot labyrinth of streets and alleys, his companion cried out that the auberge of All the Angels was just before them, and he spied the tarnished signboard flaunting

its throng of gilded wings, which he had noted that afternoon.

"Since we are here," he suggested, "suppose that you remain, mademoiselle. I will do your errand at the Univers, where it chances that I am stopping. At least," he added, as she seemed to hesitate, "we will submit the plan to your mistress."

A sharp glance at his face, as if to see whether she might successfully demur, was the only sign of the chagrin he believed the girl must feel at thus being deprived of any excuse for leaving her mistress longer alone.

"Then I 'm not to see monsieur again?" she pouted.

"There 's something to remember him by, in any case." And as he led her through the open door, he slipped a broad silver piece beneath the fingers that clung to his arm. She gave him a bright smile for thanks and with a final enchanting flash of silken stocking ran away up the steep dark stairs that led from the narrow entrance hall.

Now he was free to carry out the remainder of his plan. The maid was safe back at her inn; the young girl had once more the protection of her maid — whatever that might be worth; and he needed no special charge to bear to the delinquent lover the news that his beloved awaited him at the appointed place. Every consideration of prudence moved him to immediate departure, not the least of these the advantage of *not* arriving at his hotel accompanied by a lady's maid in a torn petticoat. He had had

one experience of the consequences of a chance encounter with a pretty girl in his hotel at Paris some months ago. It would make an amusing episode in his new book, that affair. But in fact it had been so decidedly unpleasant to be told that he must leave the house next morning that he had no desire to risk a repetition of it.

The suspicious glower of the one-eyed guardian at the door of this auberge of All the Angels gave him a foretaste of what he might have had to expect at the highly correct Hôtel de l'Univers. Yet he shuffled his feet in indecision. After all, he was n't going to take the girl with him now. He would insist upon her remaining, whether that passion-drugged child upstairs wished it or not. And to sneak off under the glance of this filthy-minded guardian of the proprieties would be like a confession of guilt. He steeled himself to endure it, hummed an air, yawned, sampled his snuffbox, and with hands in breeches pockets and head on one side studied a peeling fresco of Pope John XXII by the light of the single smoky lamp. Was he going to let this ghoul of reputations frighten him into discourtesy to two charming women? Besides, there was a chance that the young lady might wish to see him, a chance which his curiosity would n't have let him miss for a great deal.

As the long minutes passed, however, his discomfort changed, first to wonder, and then to uneasiness. Could he have avoided entangling himself with the Marquis de Sain'terre only to fall into one of the

traps set for the unwary traveler in a foreign city? But the reappearance of the femme de chambre set his mind at rest on this point. Her eyes were wide with alarm, and without so much as a glance at him she sprang from the stairs to the concierge at the door.

"Mademoiselle, my mistress? Has she gone out?" she demanded.

"But evidently. Mademoiselle has not found her above."

"Then the gentleman who engaged the chambers, the young Irish officer, came for her? She went with him?"

"A gentleman came, certainly."

"Yes. I know. The Marquis de Sain'terre. I met him outside. Surely it was not the marquis with whom she went!"

"*Vraiment!* The gentleman may have been a marquis for what I know. Most of them are marquises or counts who call here. If one were to attempt to charge one's mind with the name and rank of every person —"

"Species of imbecile!" cried the girl, ready to weep with fright and vexation. "Do you tell me my mistress went out with this gentleman?"

"No. I am as far from telling ma'moiselle such a falsehood as ma'moiselle herself could be. Ma'moiselle's mistress went out alone and in a great hurry."

"Alone? How long ago?"

"One fears one's mentality is too weak to satisfy ma'moiselle's more precise inquiries," the one-eyed

creature replied with an ugly smile. Sterne took another of his broad silver pieces from his pocket and let it slip through his fingers to ring on the flagging of the hall.

"The young lady I seek," he began, dexterously recovering the coin and tossing it from hand to hand as he approached the concierge, "is in need of some guidance, as a man of your experience must already have observed. It is for that purpose that her maid sought me out and brought me here. Is it your opinion that we should be successful in finding her if we went out at once, or had I best inform my good friend the Vice Legate and through him the police? Do not hurry yourself in replying, but first do me the favor of accepting this small coin which you will know so much better how to expend for the relief of the poor of Avignon than I, a stranger, possibly could."

At the size of the honorarium, the implication of friendship in the highest quarters, and especially the speaker's air of genial condescension, the manner of the concierge became like melted butter.

"To follow the lady? Ah, but that would only put the English milord to useless inconvenience, for it must be upwards of half an hour since she went out."

"Then the marquis's call was a short one?"

"Quite short. And she went out within five minutes after he did, one should think."

"In what direction? A man of observation like yourself will not have failed to note."

"Monsieur is right. I did. Just outside she

paused as if uncertain, spoke to a passing street boy, gave him a penny, and he led her in the direction of the palace."

"One would go by that way to the Hôtel de l'Univers?"

"Supposing that one cared to go to the Hôtel de l'Univers, Monsieur."

Sterne looked at the femme de chambre.

"Is it not highly probable," he asked, "that your mistress heard from the marquis that Lieutenant O'Hara is supping at the Univers, and that she decided in her impatience to set out to find him there?"

"It is possible. Anything is possible. She is perfectly mad," cried the girl, weeping with apprehension. "Figure her to yourself, monsieur, alone in the streets of this wicked city at such an hour, with a wretch of a gamin for guide, and she in her sixteenth year and of a beauty worth her weight in gold!"

"Then the sooner I make sure that she has reached Lieutenant O'Hara in safety," Sterne comforted, "the better for us all."

"And if she has not — if harm has befallen her," sobbed the girl, "O'Hara will kill me. She is his sole hope of salvation from the Jews."

"Then you shall wait here, lest you should suffer the fate of the bearers of evil tidings. Go up to your mistress's room and remain there. That will be best in every way, for in case O'Hara should not have arrived at the Univers she might well return here, and it would be a pity if she did not find you waiting.

I may even meet her on the way," he soothed, and with a bow, and a nod to the concierge, he went out briskly, feeling that he had killed two birds with one stone.

About him the air was languid and full of the sound of lutes and the scent of walled gardens pouring their sweetness into the summer night. Not a breath of the evening wind had yet penetrated into these central streets. Church bells answered one another in the chime of the hour. A member of the Pope's Noble Guard swung past, all dim scarlet and silver, masked for amorous enterprise, a domino trailing from one arm. Two Swiss Guards in Michel Angelo's slashings of yellow and red laughed with a couple of girls by the flare of a corner wineshop. A slim young shape scurried with a giggle up an alley at his approach. High overhead, where the tiles of the opposing houses almost met, the deep sky flushed slowly with the rising of the moon, and in the treetops above a garden wall a nightingale began to sing.

Free from temptation, he insensibly relinquished himself to the charm of his surroundings. His pace fell to a stroll. He wished Lydia could hear that bird: she so dearly loved all sweet sounds. If only he had her beside him now to double his enjoyment! He must bring her this way to-morrow evening. But she must keep close beside him, her arm in his. Another scampering rush had gone down an alley toward the river, light feet and heavy, but no giggle this time — a sound like a throttled scream. He quickened his steps and was fain to seek comfort in

the thought that it could not yet have been quite dark when the young lady passed this way. Another thought spurred him faster. Why should the marquis have told her where her lover was to be found? It was to the marquis's interest to keep the two apart, not to bring them together. Suppose he had n't told her? Suppose he had given her a false address, some low place where he could have his will of her undisturbed? And she was a very rich heiress, according to her maid. If the marquis had learned that, cupidity would be added to desire in him. Sterne was almost running now. Suppose he did n't find her at the Univers, what then?

CHAPTER III

JACKAL'S MEAT

"If He play, being young and unskilful, for shekels of silver and gold,
"Take His money, my son, praising Allah. The Kid was ordained to be sold."

Certain Maxims of Hafiz.

For the sake of coolness the supper of Monseigneur le Comte d'Albanie — such being what the servants could make of his outlandish title — was served in the courtyard of the Hôtel de l'Univers. Small orange trees in green tubs screened a remote corner from the vulgar gaze. Candles in massive candlesticks of silver-gilt shed their soft illumination over the glossy foliage, the immaculate napery, and the mellow pink of the surrounding walls. At a side table two men-servants with the faces and movements of sacristans were noiselessly busy about the yellow flames of chafing dishes, and the air was delicately scented with the promise of a repast worthy of an establishment which for decades had been the house of call of bishops, mitred abbots, and prioresses of noble blood, whom business with the Vice Legate had brought to this outpost of Rome. More than one cardinal had

made humility his excuse for preferring its comforts to the fourteenth-century rigors of vice-legatine hospitality in the palace of the Popes hard by. There was a legend that the house was a direct descendant of a religious foundation for the entertainment of pilgrims, and that its name had been cut down from "Hostel of the Church Universal" to suit the taste of a freethinking age. Certainly, from the cocked hat and silver-headed staff of the red-coated Swiss at the gate to the men like sextons who filled the ewers of water and made the beds in the chambers above, nothing was lacking to assure the visitor that here he lodged in the all but official guest-house of the Holy See.

But these subdued splendors, their semiecclesiastical elegance, even the preparations for his supper, appeared to have no attraction for the man for whom they were displayed. Decidedly a fine figure in his white satin coat, his still abundant hair powdered, puffed over the ears, and drawn back to be tied at the nape of the neck by a broad blue ribbon whose ends were carried forward over the shoulders and clasped by a jewel that dangled at his breast, the Count of Albany slouched above the tablecloth, now momentarily intent upon the dice which he was shaking, right hand against left, now raising his large prominent eyes at the sound of any step on the flagstones beyond the orange-tree screen. When the footfalls turned aside or died away up the broad stone stair that led to the principal rooms of the hotel, whichever hand was free of the dice box stole to his

empty fob, to fall away with a twitch of impatience; and when a church clock chimed the three-quarters over the roofs, he listened like a man who for long has been wondering what exactly the time might be.

He had seldom felt so bored, even in a life that for the past sixteen years had held little else than boredom. The one vital sensation within him was that infernal gnawing lust for the brandy which he had given his word not to touch — save for one small glass after dinner. Not that his word need have mattered; he had broken it in that connection too many times before. But Rumbold — he never could think of the fellow by his silly papal title — had taken him *au pied de la lettre* and put such a measure of the fear of God into the servants that not one of them would bring him a dram.

Now with brandy even the ennui of the past fortnight, cooped up in this hotel, in this town where he dare not show his face outside, might have been tolerable. Brandy would have sweetened the bitter memories of his last sojourn here in the great house three streets away, where years ago he had kept his state for those few months as "Prince of Wales." Brandy would have killed this silly homesickness for the snug quarters in Paris and evenings that were at least enlivened by squabbles with Clementina across a tavern table. It would have made ridiculous the still sillier homesickness for Clementina herself, who — he quite agreed with his straitlaced adherents — was no more than a bad habit with him, and whom

he would willingly have sent packing if they had n't had the effrontery to tell him that he must.

On the other hand, brandy was responsible for the plight in which he found himself; and he hated the clarity of mind, born of his recent abstinence, by which he was able to realize the fact. Never, unless he had been half drunk, would he have caught fire at Sain'terre's crazy scheme of carrying him off from Paris, away from his slatternly mistress and boon companions, to cure him of his vices and make him once more such a figure as the adherents of his cause could point out to the world as the ensample of princely virtues he had shown himself in '45. But that had n't been the brandy alone. Mostly it had been the wonder of hearing such a proposal, with its connotation of devotion and faith, from such a man. The Devil preaching Calvinism in a Geneva gown would have astonished him less. And amazed, unwary, he had glowed with the other's heat, had seen himself again a desirable *parti*, wedded to an heiress of the noblest blood, once more the recipient of a pension, if not from France, then it might be from Austria or Spain — in a word, ready, when next the peace of Europe should be broken, to be such a counter on the political board as the great players would push forward to a crown.

Well, he had done his part, had he not? He had done without the "nasty bottle" which his brother, the cardinal, wrote about so smugly. (As if that same cardinal's hat in the family had n't done more to ruin their cause than all the brandy drinking

of the last fifteen years!) He had stayed in his room, reading his eyes blind. He had walked for exercise at dead of night: they could n't afford even to hire horses. And what was the result? Their money was gone; the proceeds of their pawned watches had shrunk to a handful of louis; the hotel bill was a week overdue; only that morning he had heard the *maître d'hôtel* inform Sain'terre that their rooms had been promised months ago to an English milord who would arrive on the morrow, and that all the other rooms in the house were taken. The pretext was palpable. It was the slack season, and no English milord worthy of the name would look at such quarters. Almost under the tiles, it had stretched even the modest appearance of dignity required by his strict incognito to occupy them. The fact of the matter was that, unless the expected messenger from Lawson Trotter at Paris should arrive with the customary remittance before morning, Avignon would witness a third departure of a Stuart prince from its gates, and the most ignominious of all three.

He had reached the point of wondering whether or not he would have to reveal his identity in order to escape a debtor's prison, when the sound of a heavy stride approached rapidly across the courtyard. He raised his head and called out petulantly: —

"Rumbold, is that you? Body of God, Jack, a man might drink himself to death while you are pottering about on an errand I could have done in half an hour!" He spoke in English with the free-

dom of perfect familiarity but with the accent picked up in his childhood in Italy and strengthened by the long years spent in France.

"You found our man? You have the money? No, I have n't been drinking, confound you! Not one drop," he added, as the Marquis de Sain'terre, hat in hand, paused in the opening between the orange trees and under cover of a brief ceremonial bow swept the table-top and his master's face with a look of anxiety and suspicion.

"The man's here all right, sir," he replied, his great eyebrows lifting in what the other evidently recognized as a request for permission to be seated and acknowledged with a wave of his lace-ruffled hand. "The man 's here, though his wife and daughter are not with him as Trotter's letter led us to expect. That accounts for Jules's having missed him at the landing, I suppose. My word, this feels good! The streets are still like ovens hereabouts."

He dropped into a chair and thrust back his wig. His close-clipped poll, beaded with sweat, accentuated the sinister aspect of his face.

"Then you have the money?" the Count of Albany insisted anxiously. For in imagination he had just seen himself avoiding the debtor's prison only to be thrust back into France with so much clamor that France in turn had been compelled to thrust him out of her comfortable territories.

"He will put it into your hands to-night."

"To-night?" cried the count aghast, then, springing to his feet, furiously, "You mean he would n't

deliver it to you, and you have let him out of your sight? Body of God, was ever a luckless prince so ill-served as I am? What wonder if I forget I am a prince, as in England they say I do?"

"I could n't very well bring him through the streets by the scruff of the neck, could I?" the marquis grumbled. But he might as well have saved his breath. The tirade swept on unchecked till passion and strength seemed to have spent themselves simultaneously.

The taller of the two by half a head, his large frame only beginning to suggest the gauntness that came upon him later, the count showed none of the hardihood, physical and mental, which distinguished his companion. Dissipation, which had graven the face of the latter with lines of evil strength, had only ravaged features that still reflected a glorious youth and lofty aspirations never quite resigned. His outburst left him with eyes moist, shaking fingers, and trembling lips.

"You gave him the password?" he asked after a pause of which the other had not availed himself.

"I spoke of you as Count of Albany, as Trotter bade. I even told him plainly that Trotter had written you to expect him. But he would have nothing to say to me. . . . He treated me as one treats a gentlemanly sharper whom one wishes to get rid of without unpleasantness."

"Yet you tell me he will come this evening! You sit there as smug as a beadle at a funeral! You even smile! Body of God, I fail to see —"

The marquis checked this fresh outburst with a hard laugh.

"When a man has stumbled upon a vein of virgin gold," he explained in answer to his master's stare of affronted amazement, "it is a little difficult to feel much interest in a wretched pittance scraped together by a parcel of out-at-elbows refugees and grudged by a set of case-hardened exiles."

The count drew himself up with a dignity, even something of majesty, that sat strangely well on his broad shoulders and filled his weary eyes with a light that made the beholder forget for the moment the dark puffs beneath them.

"If the Marquis de Sain'terre can allow himself to sneer at the sources of our subsistence, we cannot permit the sacrifices of our faithful adherents to be belittled in our presence," he admonished with such sincerity as all but excused the sentimental satisfaction that rang in his tones. "The old Countess of Cowdor denies herself snuff and tea in our service; the Laird of Aberfoyle drinks only *vin ordinaire;* Trotter writes — "

"Yes, my dear Charles. 'T is vastly affecting, and most gratifying to an exiled prince, no doubt," the marquis agreed ironically. "I suppose the Abbé Donovon's opera girl will be stinted by as much as a pair of paste buckles for her second-best shoes, in consequence, while the morning grog of the Royal Irish will be watered for a full month to pay for their colonel's munificent contribution to your Royal Highness's support. But will you forgive me for

saying that it will not butter many parsnips, when I repeat that we have a gold mine ready to spill into our laps?"

"Perhaps you will be so good as to explain yourself," the count returned sullenly. He took up the dice box, as if to support his patience during the recital. But a hundred words had not been spoken before he put it down in amazement.

"Mademoiselle de Saint Pol du Var? The granddaughter of the old Duke of Vence?" he exclaimed. "Are you sure?"

"Should I be taking up your time, sir, if I were not?"

"But she is the richest heiress in France, and promises, I have heard, to be the most beautiful — so much so that the old man was constrained to put her into a convent three months ago to keep her safe until she was ready to be introduced to society."

"She is as much the one as the other. Listen."

His tale finished, the marquis sat expectant of the applause he felt sure of. But puzzlement and annoyance were all that appeared on the face of his auditor.

"Are you striving to amuse yourself or me, Jack?" the count inquired after a moment of silence. "The heat must have made me dull, for I protest I'm at a loss —"

"And I protest that I was never more serious in my life, sir," the marquis retorted haughtily. "The young lady is without doubt Mademoiselle de Saint Pol du Var. She —"

"If you told me she was Queen of Sheba, I should find it easier to believe than some other things in your narrative."

"Your Royal Highness will be good enough to explain?" begged the marquis with dangerous obsequiousness.

The count laughed in arch good humor.

"Am I to understand that Sir John Rumbold, Marquis de Sain'terre, baron of the Empire, knight of St. Stanislaus of Poland, hero of more years of mixed fighting and genteel rascality than I care to count up, whose conquests are still remembered in Vienna, whose disappearance from Paris put half the ladies of the Palais Royal into the sulks, finds himself alone in her bedchamber, in such an inn as the All Angels, with the richest heiress in France, a beauty and hardly more than a child, and emerges with nothing to show for it but an inexplicable expectation that she will follow him to his hotel? Why, the greatest fortune in France would have been in your grasp in the circumstances you describe! In an hour the girl would have been on her knees to you to save her from a convent for life! Or did you forget that your precious Italian marquise got your marriage annulled at Rome last year? To be sure, you never did remember it before.

"No, *mon brave*," he ended. "'T is a very pretty fable for a warm evening. I ask your pardon for misunderstanding your purpose in telling it."

"Nevertheless," growled the marquis, whose head had sunk lower and lower during the count's raillery

till only the tops of his burning ears showed on either side of his clipped poll, "nevertheless —"

He could get no further. What had actually happened was hardly less incredible to himself than to his master. He, who was all that the count had just enumerated, had been shown the door by a mere girl — less than a girl, a child, a chit. With a return of the sense of mysterious frustration with which he had descended to the street, he saw himself, obsequious, smooth, plausible, in the young lady's presence; he heard the volubility of his excuses for his rudeness at the gate, the curiously flat sound of his compliments, and suffered again from the maladroit effect of his offer to conduct her to the place where Lieutenant O'Hara was sure to be found. In imagination he saw her again as if she still stood before him. Taller than he had expected from his first glimpse of her, the tempting exuberance of her form was somehow less conspicuous than it had been in the wind-blown disorder of the street. Of the deep flush which had stained her from breast to forehead only a single hectic spot burned high on either cheek in the pallor of fatigue. The sombre eyes alone, abstracted, brooding, still proclaimed the passion of precocious womanhood within.

Standing in evident expectation of his departure, obviously unconscious of any motive ulterior to the avowed purpose of his presence, she had listened, pardoned, thanked him for and declined his offer with courteous finality and the grave, half-preoccupied sedateness of a well-bred little girl; and he,

with her trollop of a maid sent as far on a fool's errand as he could think on the spur of the moment, had lacked even the address to get rid of the greasy waiter who, having shown him upstairs, had stood gaping with the latch of the open door in his hand throughout the interview. It was all very much as if he had approached a child of six with *double-entendres*, he had told himself as his athletic limbs bore him toward the Univers. But that explained nothing, would only deepen his master's incredulity should he mention it. He continued silent after his single word. The count ran on.

"Why, you would n't have had need to fear even the Bastille, since we are in Papal territory!" But there was a note of argument in his voice now, as if the evident disorder of the marquis had shaken his conviction of a minute before.

"How did I know you would n't want her yourself?" the latter demanded gruffly, his head still down; and his diffidence at having the acknowledgment of this last remaining ideal of conduct wrung from him made his gross personality, for that instant, as likable as a shamefast schoolboy's. His sincerity was not to be doubted. Indeed, through all the welter of potential gratifications, lust, greed, the itch for power, with which the discovery of the defenseless girl had set his head whirling, the thought that somehow or other she must be utilized to serve his master and his master's cause had done as much as her mysterious unapproachability to rob him of resource and tie his tongue in her presence.

"You could marry some princess of royal blood and do worse," he added with a certain wistfulness, as his master, blind or indifferent to this manifestation of instinctive devotion, continued to regard him with amused uncertainty.

"You forget that I have promised never to marry until I — or my father — am seated on the throne rightfully ours. If that is not to be, I will not project beyond my own life the seeds of uncertainty, misery, and discord which the assertion of our claims necessitates."

As the count spoke, the subtle air of majesty again surrounded him, and again his words rang with sentimental satisfaction at their high-minded content.

The marquis shrugged.

"Wait till you've seen her."

"Ah, yes. I am to see her," gibed the count, shedding his majesty like a garment. "She is coming here to-night — for the sake of your *beaux yeux*, I suppose. I had forgot. Sir John Rumbold has no need of our coarse methods. The hour at which he finds himself with the girl being not quite convenient, he merely puts a spell on her."

"She will come in search of her lover, I tell you," the marquis retorted, "the Irish officer whom I invited to supper and cards. We have only to dispose of him —"

"Ah, yes. The Irish officer is coming too." The count jeered like a gamin. "Truly we shall have the semblance of a reception, with all these people, and one unmatched for the motives of those attending it,

I 'll be sworn! First, the clergyman, though he refused all intercourse with you as our accredited agent; then the lady, forsaking the appointed place of rendezvous with her intended; finally the lover, the intended himself, willing to spend at cards and wine a night whose any moment might be expected to bring the consummation of all his hopes! Truly—"

"You know, sir," the marquis interrupted with the grave good humor of one who has seen his man in this mood too often not to know how to handle him, "'t would serve you right if I took your incredulity at its face value and appropriated the girl and her fortune to myself."

"Do so, by all means, my dear fellow," laughed the count. "Or stay! It shall be a wager between us. If she comes and you have your will with her, — I give you leave to try, — you may marry her, and I stipulate only that you allow me a spare bedchamber in the meanest of her châteaux. If she does n't come, or does come and yet you fail, we drop at once this dismal effort of yours to make an abstemious, model aspirant to my father's throne out of me; we slip back to Paris; and I return to my snug hiding-place and the arms of my Clementina — provided somebody else is n't already in them.

"Refuse," he added, as the marquis seemed to hesitate, "and I go back to Paris to-morrow. For by the Body of God I 'd sooner be a prisoner in Vincennes again than pass another day in this doleful inn."

The threat was evidently more than sufficient to

put to rest the last scruple of the marquis. His hairy fist closed on the count's long, slim fingers in confirmation of the wager.

"There must be no violence, mind!" the count stipulated.

"Your Royal Highness means, you will not tolerate being made aware of any," grinned the marquis. "You shall not be. My word for it."

The church clock struck eight across the housetops, and a servant bowed beside the table to announce that monseigneur was served.

"Where's Jules?" demanded the count, fixing him with a glance of quick suspicion. "Where's my own man?"

"Important business has detained Jules," the marquis interjected in French, his great eyebrows signaling caution. "I had him make your dressing-room presentable for the girl to wait in," he added in English; and in the same tongue, as the regular tap of a metal-shod staff and the sound of two several footfalls approached across the flagstones beyond the orange trees, "Remember. Not a word of her arrival in town. We are not supposed to know so much as her name."

"Monsieur le Lieutenant Donat O'Hara," announced the Swiss, truncheon at salute.

The charm of the Stuarts has passed into a proverb, and none of them knew how to exercise it more potently than Charles Edward Louis Philip Casimir, the last of the line. Men had perished for him in hopeless battles with a happy laugh, had died for

him on the scaffold with the serenity of the beatified, had stinted and starved through half a lifetime of bleak exile that he might shine in jewels and satin and lie softly every night, and women had strewn their beauty and their honor at his feet, content did he deign to trample them in the mire. Small wonder then if the young Irishman felt the sensations of transfiguration in the presence of this living symbol of the cause in which three generations of his forebears had poured out their blood and treasure and eaten the bread of foreign masters in the hard service of an alien land! It had needed far less than the winsomeness for which Charles Edward was famous to blind him to the puffy eye-sockets, the pendulous jowl and petulant lower lip, and to make him see instead the demigod of his childhood, the hero of Prestonpans and the march to Derby, of Culloden and the flight through the Highlands.

The count's condescension was exquisite: the young O'Hara must sit at his right hand — No, no! No ceremony! Of homage still less. One's incognito was anything but formal, even in the territory of the Church, since the Hanoverian honored him by making his whereabouts matter for treaties. One understood that monsieur le lieutenant was fond of cards. Honest Jack Rumbold had told one so, and one remembered hearing of an elder O'Hara's prowess at play during the Fifteen. The lieutenant's grandfather? Ah, one had suspected as much. One's memory? But no, nothing remarkable in remembering what one heard of the O'Hara of Kenmare. And

if two generations had n't altered the strain, one would wager that the O'Hara's grandson had as rare a wrist with the dice himself. What did he say to a main or two on the corner of the table between courses? The count rattled the dice box in so brisk an invitation as no man of spirit could resist.

While he did full justice to the excellent supper, the Marquis de Sain'terre watched the two with a gleam of sardonic amusement behind the satisfaction visible in his slaty eyes: this precious master of his, ennui, disappointment, ill-temper, all forgotten in his passion for gambling, his vanity soothed by the abject adoration of this scapegrace youth who bent fascinated over the hazard of the dice, enchanted by the thought that he who deigned to rake his gold pieces so steadily across the table was none other than the son and heir of his rightful, God-appointed sovereign. Elbows on the cloth, one hand propping his low smooth brow, he hardly touched the dishes which in turn were set before him, but between his turns at the dice box drank from his glass of cool, deceptive Chateauneuf du Pape which the marquis kept constantly refilled at his elbow, and drank the more deeply as the heavy purse he had flung down before him grew more and more flabby and wrinkled.

With the serving of the dessert, a man whose expressionless features and sober perfection of attire would have proclaimed him anywhere the body servant of a great gentleman, approached the marquis, and, bowing close beside him, slipped something

into his hand. Once more those useful eyebrows of the marquis did duty for his tongue.

"Quite content," the man murmured in reply, through lips that hardly moved. "Her maid came half an hour ago, as monsieur le marquis anticipated, and the young lady sent her for her dressing-case and a change of attire."

"She believes then —"

"But undoubtedly. I told her that monseigneur, out of love for the lieutenant, had given him rooms in his own suite. Her single anxiety is to be ready to receive the young gentleman the moment monseigneur is pleased to excuse him."

The marquis nodded dismissal. Then, seeing that young O'Hara was poring over the dice with eyes no longer quite so keen as they had been, he coughed slightly and with a grin of triumph held up a key to the glance which his master threw him in response.

The cloth was lifted; fruit, port, and brandy were placed on the table, together with a silver bell to summon at need the servants who now left the gentlemen to the relaxations of the evening. The marquis yawned. Dearly would he have loved to suggest a hand of cards or to have a throw of the dice himself, but he was too old a gambler to risk spoiling his master's extraordinary run of luck by so much as proposing such a thing. Anyhow the game could n't last much longer at the rate at which O'Hara's purse had been shrinking. What the wretched young ass would do when it was flat the marquis hardly troubled himself to think. He would leave the Hôtel de

l'Univers at all events, and the marquis greatly doubted that, drunk and penniless, he would seek the auberge of All the Angels that night. Whatever he might do in the morning did not matter: it would be too late.

Meanwhile, the marquis found his own position growing more and more tiresome. Under his breath he hummed an air, only to stop short, shocked at recognizing it as the tune of "Johnny Cope," charged with ill-omened memories of the short-lived triumph of Prestonpans. His glance sought a certain window high in the façade above him, and he wondered whether from that lookout an observer could note the increasing bleariness of the young Irishman's glance, the growing uncertainty of his hands, and catch his thickened utterance. That had been a master stroke, to place her in a room whence she could not fail to see by how much her lover's passion for gambling exceeded his passion for her.

If she were indeed looking down upon the candlelit group about the table, she took good care to remain invisible to those below. But the marquis had no need of the sight of her to gloat upon her charms. The young abundance of her breast, the melting curves of shoulder and waist, were printed on his memory; and with the eye of the accomplished sensualist, which is like the sculptor's for penetration, he undressed her before his mental vision till the rounded slenderness of her made him squirm in his chair and he lifted to her window the glare of a winter wolf.

All that beauty, all the wealth and power that went with it, were his for the mere stretching out of his strong hands to seize them. At the thought, only the ingrained teaching of a lifetime kept him in his place, subservient to his master's leisure, to all appearance dissembling politely a natural boredom. Presently, of course, young O'Hara would either slip dead-drunk beneath the table or reel out past the yawning night-porter at the gate, penniless either way. Then — and it would be better so, he reminded himself. Having seen her lover's faithlessness, the girl would be on the rebound. Mere persuasion, such persuasion as he knew how to use, would settle the business; and although to triumph by sheer strength gave him a thrill like nothing else, that would be difficult in so respectable a hostelry as this.

Doubtless it was this disordered state of mind on the part of the Marquis de Sain'terre that made it possible for an under-servant, turnspit or scullion, to slip between the orange trees at this moment, drop a folded scrap of paper on the table, and, with a muttered "*pour le monsieur irlandais*," to escape unquestioned. Mechanically noting that the occurrence had passed unobserved by the two at their dice, he opened the missive and even read it through without any other thought than one of satisfaction at having intercepted it. Then he was struck by the strangeness of its being written in English. An instant later astonishment and alarm drove him from his chair. What Englishman could there be in

Avignon who not only was interested in telling young O'Hara that his promised bride was in the city but also possessed the knowledge of the exact location of the room she occupied at that moment in the Hôtel de l'Univers? He stole with the utmost caution to the opening between the little trees. But the courtyard lay empty, all blue pavement and walls of an incredible pink, under a sailing moon.

He returned to his place, suddenly and unhappily aware of the fact that he knew very little of any other guests who might be lodged in the hotel that night. No English had been there yesterday, but decidedly he had been guilty of an oversight in not asking Jules what travelers had come by the Lyons boat and in resting satisfied with the statement that no English clergyman accompanied by his wife and daughter had disembarked that afternoon. Some might even have come by the diligence, supposing that highly unpunctual vehicle to have already put in an appearance. And there rose up to haunt him that spectre which disquieted many of his leisure hours: namely, the vision of Clementina Walkinshaw, the slighted mistress, the woman scorned and eluded, made cognizant somehow of the hiding-place of her fugitive lover and arriving, offended Juno and pure termagant by turns, to wreck his plans and drag his prince and patient back to comfortable squalor and the brandy bottle.

He took himself in hand. He had been letting his imagination run away with him. After all, having intercepted the letter and been put on his guard

thereby, only ordinary watchfulness was necessary — ordinary watchfulness coupled with a slightly refined address, perhaps. He had taken possession of the brandy bottle at its first appearance, and, having poured out suitable potations for his master and the young Irishman, had kept it out of their reach, assiduously replenishing the glass of the latter with port and that of the former more sparingly with the same beverage. Now he poured a generous measure of the fiery amber liquid into a goblet, added wine to the brim, and substituted the mixture for the nearly empty glass at O'Hara's elbow. Without observing the change, the young man gulped the half of it at once. Nevertheless the movement proved to have been ill-timed. The church clock struck eleven. Dice box uplifted for the throw, he paused to count the strokes. His glance fell upon the shriveled purse lying open on the table before him, and he dashed his hand across his eyes for a second look at it.

"Faith, but your Royal Highness has rooked me properly!" he exclaimed with a tipsy laugh. Then his lips closed and set in an expression of desperate self-command. He spilled the few remaining gold pieces out in front of him.

"Will you condescend to oblige me by doubling the stakes?" he asked with careful enunciation.

He threw and won.

"Double again?"

The count nodded. They threw in turn, and again the count lost.

"And yet again?" cried O'Hara, leaving his winnings where they lay and holding the dice box aloft while his antagonist counted out a sum equal to the shining heap which had now grown to a considerable size.

Unconsciously, his lower lip caught under his big white upper teeth, the Marquis de Sain'terre thrust his great body over the table. His master's winnings had diminished to three or four golden louis. Should O'Hara win again and again repeat his challenge, marquis and count between them would not be able to make up more than a small fraction of the required stake; and with even the most complaisant of players the game would not long survive the issue of a princely I O U. Yet to decline to play longer, to let this young fool — a murrain on his thick Irish head! — stagger away with that swollen purse, was intolerable.

"A toast, O'Hara!" he cried jovially. "A toast to your luck! In all my days I never saw the like of it." He filled the three goblets to the top, coolly, under the young man's glassy stare, loading his victim's more heavily with brandy than before. "A soldier's toast! No heeltaps, mind!"

Over the rim of his glass his compelling gaze held O'Hara's till the last drop had been swallowed and the goblet rattled on the table-top. A visible shudder ran through O'Hara's frame and passed over his features like the passage of an icy wind across a summer pool. He swayed on his chair. But with an effort he conquered it, gripping the table edge till his knuckles whitened.

"I — I await — your Royal Highness's leisure," he smiled stiffly.

The count raised the box with a rattling flourish.

"One moment, sir, I beg," the marquis interposed. There had been a movement in the opening between the orange trees. A turn of his head, and his sigh of relief was almost audible. "'T is Lawson Trotter's messenger, sir, the Reverend Laurence Sterne of Coxwold in Yorkshire. You will excuse His Royal Highness, I am sure, my dear O'Hara. This gentleman brings him business of the utmost importance.

But he might have spared himself the trouble of the apology. On the contents of the lifted dice box the young man had fixed his last remaining gleam of consciousness. As that came down unspilled, the gleam went out. His arms flapped before him on to the table. His head thudded down upon them, knocking his glass to the pavement. There it tinkled in a score of fragments as the Reverend Mr. Sterne advanced with a smile and the bow he had lately learned in the salon of the Duc de Choiseul.

CHAPTER IV

LE PARSON YORICK S'AMUSE

"There is no audacity like the audacity of weakness."
A Cup of Cold Water.

His friend, the distinguished actor, Mr. David Garrick himself, would have admired the start of surprise which just perceptibly checked Mr. Sterne's advance at the point where the flames of the candles no longer prevented a clear view of the features of the Count of Albany. His large expressive eyes threw a glance of reproach at the Marquis de Sain'terre, saying as plain as words: "Why did n't you tell me? It would have saved a world of trouble." His manner, which up to that moment had expressed the pleasant anticipation of a convivial gentleman about to meet congenial company, changed to the stiff, slightly awkward bearing of a country parson who unexpectedly finds himself in the presence of a personage of the most exalted rank. The bow he made, as the marquis rose and presented him in form, was wooden, almost bucolic.

"Our features are evidently not unknown to you, Mr. Sterne," said the count, smiling and stretching out his hand, "though Rumbold tells me you did not appear to recognize our present style. We supposed

that Mr. Lawson Trotter would have acquainted you with it when he made you his emissary."

"The portraits of — of your Royal Highness — that is to say, your Royal Highness's portraits are not easily forgotten." And having boggled over the title as thoroughly as he conceived that a Yorkshire vicar of sound Whig principles ought to do when taken thus off his guard, he went on in some apparent embarrassment: "It must have been because we happened to be speaking French at the moment that I entirely misunderstood Sir John Rumbold this afternoon and took 'Albany' for 'Albania.' No wonder my jesting struck him as singularly ill timed!"

"I can imagine your amazement," the count returned graciously, "when, instead of a half-savage hospodar of the Balkan mountains, you find —"

"Your Royal Highness," Sterne interjected.

"You find, I was about to say," the count corrected him with suavity, "the person to whom Mr. Trotter had entrusted you with a mission singularly confidential."

"Monseigneur," Sterne replied earnestly, "you speak in English, but, were you the hospodar of the Balkans that you mention, and did you speak in his half-savage dialect, I could not be further from understanding you than I am. Mr. Lawson Trotter entrusted me with no mission. Indeed, I cannot recall that any mention of your name passed between us, certainly none of the Count of Albany."

An oath burst from the Marquis de Sain'terre. He

laid an impetuous hand on his sword hilt, but his master checked him with a glance.

"Monsieur le Marquis," inquired the count, "do you happen to have Trotter's letter on you? Then oblige me by reading its opening paragraphs to Mr. Sterne. Pray be seated, Mr. Sterne. Sit down, Jack, and try to remember that a clergyman of the Church of England does not steal for two hundred pounds."

"My order is only too much honored by your Royal Highness's confidence," murmured Sterne, but whether ironically or not the count had no leisure to determine, for the marquis growled: —

"A clergyman of the Church of England might easily conceive it his duty to prevent any form of aid and comfort from reaching you, sir."

"Read the letter, I pray you, sir," the count snubbed him.

After some adjustment of the candles so as to shed their strongest illumination on the page when he held it at arm's length, a business which afforded to Sterne's mind an almost indecent contrast between the disability of age and the lust with which he guessed the old roué to be teeming, the marquis began: —

Monseigneur: —

In spite of my greatest diligence the various contributions from the usual sources, for the collection of which I have the honor to act as your agent, have in this quarter amounted to somewhat less than the customary sum. I can only hope that the sacrifices entailed by their payment,

some instances of which I will enumerate below, may in some measure offset your disappointment, and that this prompt remittance may still further do so.

I am mighty fortunate to be able to forward the money by the hand of an English gentleman, the Reverend Laurence Sterne, Vicar of Coxwold and a prebendary of York Cathedral, who with his wife and daughter is making the journey to Toulouse for the sake of his health. You will find Mr. Sterne, in addition to being a swift and sure messenger, a man of exceptional parts. You will have heard of his *Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gent.*, which of late years has been adding to the gaiety of all the civilized nations of Europe. Possibly you have read at least a portion of this work, for I remember that you so honored the late Mr. Fielding's and, I believe, the novels of other recent English writers. And I can assure you from personal experience that you will find Mr. Sterne in conversation not less polished, urbane, adroit and witty than in his books.

The marquis ceased to read. "And what have you to say to that?" the arches of his great eyebrows demanded insolently. The look of interrogation on the face of the count, if less rude, was equally imperative.

For answer the clergyman could but shake his head with a sorry smile.

"I never heard of the business till this moment," he added. "It is possible that, when Mr. Trotter came to the point of approaching me about it, he recalled my uncle's activity — and indeed my own — in support of the opposite cause the winter of your Royal Highness's gallant march to Derby. My

guess is that he then selected another messenger, who might very likely arrive this evening by the diligence."

"The diligence must be in by this hour," the marquis objected; and a nameless apprehension at the thought of that humble conveyance made his tone even more brutal than he had intended.

"Pardon me, but I chanced to hear that it has not yet arrived. Whatever the cause of Mr. Trotter's change of mind," Sterne went on in a tone of gay frankness, "he has placed me in a situation monstrously embarrassing. 'T is always so much easier to prove the most honest man a rogue than for any but a rogue to prove that he is not one. I may turn out my pockets —"

"My dear sir!" the count cried in protest, but already Sterne had suited the action to the word.

"There is what they contain: ten louis d'or in the wallet, a handful of silver and coppers, letter of credit, passport, letters of introduction from — let me see — Monsieur le Duc de Choiseul to the Vice Legate here, from the Farmer General to the Papal Procurator, and from His Most Christian Majesty's Minister of Police to the Commissary of the Holy Office." His tone had lost none of its light sincerity, but there was something of the whist player laying down the last three trumps in the gesture with which he spread the letters upon the table, and he met the menacing glare of the marquis with a smile.

"There is the key to my room," he added carelessly. "I happened to learn this evening, by

the way, that it is next to those occupied by your Royal Highness." Then, apparently in total unconsciousness of the fact that this last statement had left the marquis gaping at him, "My portmanteau is unlocked. But even when you have searched it, my innocence will not have been established, since I might easily have deposited the money with my banker's correspondent at Lyons."

"Why did n't you tell me you were lodged here? Why did n't you say so this afternoon?" the marquis demanded, seeming to find his tongue only with an effort.

"I don't recall that the whereabouts of my lodging was touched upon. Was it?" Sterne asked negligently.

"You say you 'happened' to learn of the proximity of your chamber to the apartments of monseigneur. How?"

"You will pardon me? To be guilty of an indiscretion is the farthest from my desires." The clergyman shot a sly glance, charged with the saltiest implication, from one to the other, as if to assure himself that he had not surprised a secret which either wished to keep from his companion. Discovering only impatience and a certain uneasiness more or less clearly expressed in the eyes of both, his look became very serious and he addressed the count in tones of the utmost gravity.

"Let us say that the trifling incident has escaped my memory, sir. Let us say," he went on quickly, holding up one hand for silence, as the marquis

ground a blistering barrack-room oath between his teeth, "that if I should ever recall it, it will remind me of the romantic circumstances of the marriage of your royal father, with yourself in the rôle of James III, our friend here playing the indefatigable Mr. Wogan, while the part of the Princess Maria Clementina Sobieska is taken by — I protest, the young lady's name has already half escaped me," he broke off with a gentle smile.

"You saw her then? You recognized her? You know her?" The marquis half rose from his chair, and his hands went out over the table as if they would have taken the clergyman by the throat and choked the answer out of him of their own accord.

"In the passage, when I came in from my supper, since you insist," Sterne replied as easily as if the threatening gesture had been invisible to him. "And I was sufficiently familiar with her features to be able to recognize her, though I have not the honor of her acquaintance."

"That will do, Rumbold," the count intervened. "Mr. Sterne, I am deeply sensible of the discretion you promise. If you will exercise it for but a few days, I had almost said a few hours —" He broke off as the marquis rose and, bowing deeply, begged permission to withdraw.

"For ten minutes at most," the count nodded and wagged his head toward the sleeping lieutenant, whose stertorous breathing had for some time made an accompaniment to the conversation. "We 've a potential volcano here, remember."

"I shall not be out of earshot, sir," the marquis assured him.

"A faithful mastiff. You must pardon his overzealous devotion," said the count, a complacent smile lighting the eyes with which he followed his henchman's departure.

"Your Royal Highness has but to exist to evoke devotion," Sterne bowed.

"Alas, it seemed so once," the count murmured.

"From men and women alike," Sterne added, as if the other had not spoken.

"Tell me, sir," begged the count impulsively. "You belong somewhat to the North. Have you perchance connections in Scotland, or do you in any way hear of Miss Flora Macdonald? Of all who made sacrifices for me that fair, brave girl —"

"Beautiful!" Sterne ejaculated as the other stopped, overcome by sentimental recollections.

"Adorable!" echoed the count.

"Courageous!" The clergyman's tone outrivaled his exalted companion's in soulfulness, though he had begun unobtrusively to pick up his belongings and put them back in his pockets.

"Tender!" With an evident effort the count brought his thoughts back from the past. "Can you give me news of her?"

"Your Royal Highness will have heard of her marriage," Sterne suggested gently.

"To her cousin, some years ago. Yes. But do you know, she sent me word that she was keeping for her shroud the sheets of the bed on which —"

Emotion, or delicacy, or both, seemed to keep the count from saying more.

The clergyman, having picked up his possessions, had begun to glance around and beneath the table for the key to his chamber, and it was half absently that he took up the count's uncompleted sentence.

"The sheets of the bed in which you slept in the servants' quarters, disguised as her maid, the night she spent with her aunt? Yes, I had heard something of the sort. Touching instance of sensibility, was it not? Your Royal Highness has doubtless heard of and rejoiced at the birth of her five children," he added, giving up the search for his key and meeting with such innocent eyes the outraged glance that flashed from those of the count that the latter was forced to dissemble his anger in order to preserve his dignity.

"The lives of some women must be dreadful," he opined; "to be the wife of a man she does not love, for instance."

"Or the mistress of one who no longer loves her."

The count observed Mr. Sterne intently for some moments. Could this man of elegant address and polished language be quite the maladroit bumpkin he seemed, or was he having a little quiet fun at the expense of Monseigneur the Count of Albany? Incredible as such a thing would once have appeared, the mixed experiences of the last fourteen years had taught the heir of a score of kings that it was not impossible; and he well knew that certain episodes in his life with Miss Clementina Walkinshaw had not

escaped the ribald notice of the vulgar. Unchecked by the presence of the Marquis de Sain'terre, his hand went out to the ready counselor that had stood at his elbow ever since Culloden. From it he half filled a tumbler and gulped a mouthful neat. Meanwhile, Mr. Sterne, as if he had made the most commonplace remark in the world, had returned to the search for his key. At all costs he must be diverted from that. The count had only too strong a suspicion as to the whereabouts of that key. It would come to light surely enough — after the marquis's return.

"Your pardon!" he exclaimed with a gesture of belated hospitality. "Will you not join me?"

But Mr. Sterne prayed to be excused. He had that evening already exceeded the ration of spirits which the medical men deemed prudent for his rickety carcass.

"Then let us speak of your book," the count proposed. "I read it with much enjoyment, at least the first two volumes. I regret that the others have not fallen in my way."

The sensitive author began to be suffused with such a glow of eager expectation that he had listened for some minutes before he realized how completely he had been led to forget what really concerned him at that moment; and this was only when, after giving all praise to the skill, the freshness, and exquisite feeling of the book, the count proceeded to balance his discourse with a few words of blame.

"To be frank, I regretted your levity at times,"

he concluded. "I prefer even the ruthless audacity with which Mr. Fielding was wont to expose the frailties of our nature. I heartily approve Mr. Richardson's deploring them."

The faint grimace which flickered through Mr. Sterne's masque of deferential gravity was gone almost before it became visible.

"After all, we write of the same things," he defended himself. "If I can get a little fun out of human follies —"

"Is it well that people should be given the notion that human follies are the proper subject for fun?" the count chided gently.

"It interests me greatly to find such a view taken by your Royal Highness," Sterne replied with vivacity. "For as a rule I have observed that those who condemn my kind of writing fall into two classes only: either they are those who so greatly fear the potentialities of vice within themselves that they dare not relax so much as their risibles over the folly it leads men into, lest they relax their conduct also; or else they have become so devoted to their viciousness that they cannot endure to hear vice ridiculed. I should greatly value a full exposition of your Royal Highness's reasons for objecting to my method."

The count drew rather a long breath at the implied challenge. But he was relieved of the difficult task of justifying his opinion without landing himself in one or other category of critics by the return of the Marquis de Sain'terre. To the latter Sterne turned

with a smile and with so quiet and natural a "My key, if you please, sir," that the marquis drew it from his pocket and handed it over.

"Confess that I was right," Sterne assailed him lightly: "that although you have searched my room and luggage without avail, your opinion of my candor is no higher than before. I trust that you did not spill my vials of good English ink, both red and black, that I can hardly write without."

Caught *flagrante delicto*, even his brazen cheeks glowing with shame, the marquis was less apt than most men to keep his temper; Sterne's glance of urbane amusement at his discomfiture galled him beyond endurance; and in drawing the key from his pocket his fingers had encountered more than an excuse for a quarrel.

"Perhaps you 'll also deny that you wrote that meddlesome screed, sir," he snarled, tossing down before him the note which the scullion had dropped upon the table an hour before.

"Certainly I wrote it," Sterne replied after a single glance, and there was something almost grim in the eyes with which he met the other's furious glare.

"Jack, Jack," the count admonished wearily, "will you never understand that Mr. Sterne is not some cringing country curate to be hectored and threatened, but a distinguished churchman and man of letters who knows the world as well as you and I do?

"However," he went on after running his eyes over

the scrap of paper, "it does seem to me, Mr. Sterne, that you have here chosen to intrude in a matter —"

"It must seem so, your Royal Highness," Sterne interrupted him. "But it should be remembered that when I wrote that note I had no idea that more was involved in the matter than a love affair between a beautiful young lady and this gallant officer who has succeeded so perfectly in escaping for the nonce from the burden of his cares. When I heard her ask for him at the gate, it never crossed my mind that his name might be a mere pretext, a sort of password, as it were. So, when I observed from my chamber window — which gives an excellent view of this table, being, as monsieur le marquis knows, almost directly above it, — when I observed, I say, that no servant approached the young man with tidings of the arrival of his Dulcinea, I thought it was only the part of common humanity to write that missive and find a wretch poor enough to venture into your august presence for the sake of the small gratuity I felt able to lay out upon the venture."

Few indeed must be the grandchildren of Adam, even among those of the most unbending rectitude, who can be suddenly informed that they have been the object of some hours of espionage without being thrown into a state of rapid and uneasy retrospection. How much the more must this have been true of those who had been not only in the condition of after-dinner, unbuttoned self-indulgence characteristic of gentlemen of the eighteenth century, but also, like the count and the marquis, deeply engaged in

plans whose exposure would make short work of the last shreds of reputation that still clung to them? Otherwise the clergyman's arch innocence as he made his confession would have disarmed their fears to a certainty. But the marquis read a threat into his blandness, and the count, though less suspicious because less guilty, asked himself if there was not in his smile a mischievous enjoyment of their predicament. So strong was this feeling and so confused with speculations as to how long they had been under observation and whether or not words spoken in ordinary tones would carry to the windows above, that his next words escaped him without more premeditation than was needed to force a smile as he uttered them.

"You were at your point of vantage before the arrival of our young friend here? I ask because — that is, I wonder — because —"

The marquis saved him, blustering: —

"If so, I must say you took your time in doing your errand with His Royal Highness."

"You forget, Monsieur le Marquis, that I had no errand with His Royal Highness, properly speaking. So I thought I had best not intrude until his game with the young man seemed to be drawing to a close — and then only because you told me that for some mysterious reason he wished to see me." Sterne glanced at the unconscious O'Hara; and the others, perhaps because they knew not where else to look, turned their eyes upon him also.

As if aroused by this concentrated gaze, the young

man stirred, drew in his sprawling limbs, and reared his head erect. For a moment his eyes traveled from one attentive face to another. Then bewilderment gave place to recollection. He fetched a deep breath and let it out again, looked at the heap of golden coins still on the table before him, looked at the prince.

"A thousand — a thousand pardons, sir," he mumbled through stiffened lips. "If — if you will still so far condescend, I — I await your — your Royal Highness's pleasure." And with an abortive movement of his hand he sent the dice box spinning across the table in the general direction of his antagonist.

In two steps Sterne was at his side with the smelling-bottle to which he himself had had recourse at the humble hostelry at the gate.

"A whiff or two of this, my boy," he urged, "and you will be better able —"

O'Hara inhaled the powerful effluence deeply, gratefully; his back straightened; his shoulders squared; his eyes brightened.

"If your Royal Highness will deign to forgive my foolishness —" he begged.

The Count of Albany hesitated. It seemed a pity to let that golden harvest go unreaped. Yet, should he gather it, what sort of tale would the Reverend Mr. Sterne carry back to England of a claimant to the British throne who did not scruple to pluck a tipsy boy? The Marquis de Sain'terre was tempted to insist that O'Hara had lost the stake just before

losing consciousness, but the recollection that Sterne had actually entered within the orange-tree screen by that time deterred him.

Meanwhile Sterne, quite coolly, was sweeping the gold into O'Hara's purse, which he proceeded to present to him with a bow and a flourish.

"His Royal Highness's forgiveness," he assured him, "takes the form of excusing your further attendance this evening, Mr. O'Hara."

"And, faith, who the devil are you to speak for His Royal Highness, I 'd like to know," O'Hara demanded with drunken truculence.

"A true friend, my dear young sir, as you 'll believe when I tell you that a certain young lady —"

"Silence! God blast your meddling tongue!" roared the marquis, leaping round the corner of the table.

"— is even now waiting indoors for you," Sterne finished, unperturbed.

"Waiting? Here?" The young man seemed to become completely sober in an instant. He sprang to his feet. "Why is she not at the All Angels? How came she here?"

"She heard that you were here and followed," Sterne answered quickly. "Go to the third chamber on your right on the third floor and you will find her."

O'Hara turned on his heels. By rising he had interposed himself between Sterne and the furious nobleman, and he turned to find the latter confronting him with a look of savage determination.

"Your pardon, sir," he said, stepping aside to pass.

"And yours, I 'm sure, sir," snarled the other, and moved to block his way.

"By all the saints, man!" O'Hara cried peevishly; then, noting for the first time the expression on the features of the marquis, "You mean you would stop me?" His hand flew to his sword hilt; his jaw jutted in menace. On the point of it the clenched fist of the Marquis de Sain'terre smote with all the strength of arm and shoulder and sinewy back to drive the blow home. O'Hara spun, hands flapping wide, and fell his length.

At the crack of his head on the flagstones, the three gentlemen stood an instant frozen. From far above them came the sound of a scream stifled at its very utterance.

CHAPTER V

THE TROUBLES OF A RAVISHER

"He felt the sinister charm of beauty victimized."

Lord Raingo.

STERNE was the first to move. Dropping on his knees beside the fallen man, he loosened the stiff military stock and pressed his fingers a long minute above the carotid artery.

"I feared as much," he said at length, lifting to the fascinated gaze of the others a face of inimitable gravity. "I saw a man felled by such a blow in the barracks of my father's company when I was a boy. He died of a broken neck."

"You mean he 's dead?" whispered the count. "Body of God, Rumbold! Do you hear, man? Do you understand what you have done, you clumsy fool? What are we to do with him? What is to become of me, with this corpse hung around my neck? You persuade me hither, where I am so little welcome that, if my presence is discovered, I shall be lucky to be sent back to France in the clothes I stand up in, and then you kill a man, an officer of Berwick's, as if all else were not enough, in my presence, at my table! Berwick will be furious; he may manage to make it cost me the friendship of France and Spain.

I shall be lucky if Austria will permit me to fritter away my last days in some obscure village of the Carpathians."

He flung himself into his chair and was about to bury his face in his arms, but raised it to spit the venom of his fright.

"As for you, I hope to God I shall never see your face again. I hope that even the Grand Turk will refuse to harbor you! I hope —"

His voice had risen to a shrill scream that echoed obscenely from the walls and the blank windows of the empty courtyard. But the marquis, now on his knees beside Sterne, continued his expert examination of the victim of his anger as if he had heard that tone too often to be perturbed by it.

"The young fool 's not dead," he announced contemptuously. "Let me have your smelling-bottle, Sterne. Then run and fetch Jules to help me carry him indoors before His Royal Highness brings the place about our ears."

The learned faculties of London and Paris would have shaken their heads at the speed with which the spider-legs of their late patient carried him up the long flights to the floor on which the strictest economy had forced the Marquis de Sain'terre to choose his master's lodging. At the door of the count's room, Jules, his body servant, was shuffling his feet in a crisis of indecision as Sterne panted up to him. Evidently he had seen from the window enough to make him feel that his duty lay below. After he had rushed away, the cause of his hesitation became

obvious. As Sterne leaned against the wall to recover his breath, the voices of the two women, though muffled by closed doors, yet reached him in the unmistakable tones of passionate altercation: those of the young girl imperious, insistent; the maid's in urgent dissuasion and remonstrance. He could guess well enough the import of their words. The girl would be at the side of her fallen lover; the femme de chambre was bringing forward all the considerations of propriety and the danger of scandal to induce her to remain where she was.

Still trembling from his run, he tried the door. Jules in his haste had left it unlocked. Sterne whipped inside and closed it noiselessly behind him. His nimble brain had formed a plan as he sped up the stairs. If the girl was to be got out of the house and back to the All Angels, as she must be, in view of what he had discovered since his return, and all the more now that her fiancé had been put out of action, this moment of confusion was the time of times to accomplish it. What he had feared was that the dressing-room should prove to be an inner apartment, a sort of powdering closet, opening only into the count's chamber. The light of a dim night-lamp reassured him; the hiss and mutter of the women's voices now reached him through a closed door on his left; and a door which he had noted in the passage must communicate with any room in such a position. That accounted for the key which from his window he had seen Jules deliver to the marquis; and Jules's presence in the count's room must have been con-

sidered sufficient guard for this other means of egress. He put these swift conclusions to the test by quietly crossing the room and turning the door-handle.

The maid stood with her back to him, unalterable determination in every line of her handsome figure. Over her shoulder, in the instant before the widened eyes of her mistress made her whirl about, Sterne had a glimpse of the young girl in an attitude between entreaty and command. Engaged in a toilette which should be worthy of the coming of her bridegroom, evidently, when the sight of developments in the courtyard had driven all else from her mind, she stood in her chemise and one stocking and little beside. Her hair, brushed free of powder and unconfined, fell over her flushed, bare shoulders in a dusky torrent, whose waves flung back the candlelight in warm red glints, contrasting strongly with the cool heliotrope shimmer of the silken robe de chambre that trailed from one rounded arm.

So much of the vision of disordered loveliness was Sterne's memory able to recapture next day. Now, though his racing heart skipped and boggled at the sight, it checked him not a moment.

"Quick!" he ordered, his hand on the maid's shoulder imperiously. "Get some shoes and stockings on her. Wrap her in her cloak. He 's not dead, only struck unconscious for a minute or two. They 're taking him to the All Angels. He —"

Had he not caught her in his arms, the young girl would have darted past him through the door. He had all that wealth of young beauty clutched to his

chest for a moment, but the furious face she raised to his was so like that of a child in a dumb tantrum that his strongest impulse was to box her ears. "You 're very lovely, my dear," flashed through his head, "but after all not too nice for your young Irishman. He shall have you, and you him, if I can save you for each other." Aloud he said: — "A physician will meet them there." That was true, for he meant to fetch one himself if necessary. "Surely you will wish to be at hand when the young man opens his eyes, will you not, my child?"

He had no need of an answer. Mademoiselle de Saint Pol du Var had dropped to the floor and began to pull on her other stocking with a haste and a disregard of appearances that made him think of his daughter Lydia, as a little girl, dressing for a treat.

It was the maid, not greatly to his surprise, who attempted to be troublesome. She filled the air with her protests. She could n't find anywhere the things mademoiselle had just taken off. Mademoiselle's street dress was not in the armoire where she was sure she had hung it; and the good God himself knew what had become of her cloak. But, truly, everything had been so confused, so hurried, it saw itself, the result. And everything was to be packed — the toilette-case, the portmanteau —

Sterne flung the cloak at her, and a pair of small dusty shoes, as she wandered past him, the image of Gallic distraction, and himself filled toilette-case and portmanteau by sweeping into them all the gold-backed litter that strewed the dressing-table and

cramming everything else in on top. Then, and not till the last strap was buckled, did he turn on her continuing protests the white blaze of his wrath.

"Down the back stairs with your mistress, my girl," he commanded. "Wait for me inside the little door at the bottom. And remember: mine will be the report of you that your new master will listen to in the morning. Obey me now and a part of it may escape my memory."

"Really," the woman retorted with a toss of her head, "monsieur speaks so strangely, one is at a loss to know how to understand him."

"Monsieur the Lieutenant O'Hara will be able to understand me, however." Sterne flung the words at her with such grimness that she turned and followed the eager steps of her mistress out into the passage. At her shoulder he took care to improve the moment. "The lieutenant will understand that it was you, mademoiselle, who directed Sain'terre to your mistress's lodging and left her unattended while he went there. He will understand that it was you who allowed the child to remain here, and that you were so complaisant as to permit her to believe that in so doing she followed his instructions. And that is but a part of what he will understand of the bargain you made with Jules at the head of these stairs a few hours ago."

"I don't believe you. How could you hear us?" cried the woman. "Even if there were a word of truth — You are simply lying! You —"

"In there on my bed in the dark, mademoiselle,"

he cut her short, "tired out and resting, my door ajar for the sake of coolness. Enough! Take these things and wait below. And remember: don't let her out till I come."

He thrust dressing-case and portmanteau into her reluctant hands, — already the high heels of Mademoiselle de Saint Pol du Var were clicking on the lower treads of the flight, — and waited until the footfalls of both women were muffled by more than one winding of the stair. Still he hesitated a moment, longing to follow them at once. He distrusted the woman profoundly and had little confidence in the power of his threats. Let Sain'terre succeed, and what cause had she to fear them? The marquis would be generous in his reward; the passion of her jealousy would be gratified; and she might even recover her ascendancy over the heart of O'Hara. Robbed, beaten, discredited, and ignorant of the part she had played in his undoing, O'Hara would not be critical of the woman who still desired to win him back.

But Sterne feared for the young man too much to leave him unwatched in Sain'terre's hands during the time it would take to see Mademoiselle de Saint Pol du Var safe in the inn of All the Angels. Give that ruthless brain but time for second thought, and Donat O'Hara might be found at dawn unconscious and stripped naked, under the windows of the lowest brothel in Avignon. Or the Rhone was swift and deep, and in O'Hara's own wallet was ten times the sum necessary to provide the marquis with means

thus to dispose of his rival. That Charles Edward Stuart, Count of Albany, Pretender next in succession to the throne of Great Britain, would never sanction a deed so base, did not lessen the danger. The Count of Albany would know nothing about it. Weary with the heat of the day and the excitement of the evening, he would roll into bed with no interest in anybody or anything but himself and his own comfort. On the morrow any sort of story would serve to answer such inquiries as he might happen to remember to make.

It may have been the thought of the count's weariness that made Sterne suddenly aware of his own. When he had discovered four hours before that the principal object of his solicitude was a prisoner in the count's dressing-room, he had flung himself on his bed between open window and door with the feeling that the day's exertions had drained the last jot and tittle of his strength and that the mere watching for the opportunity to inform young O'Hara of the whereabouts of his sweetheart was almost more than he was equal to. The whispered colloquy between Jules and mademoiselle's false waiting-woman in the corridor had galvanized his energies to action, and the excitement of subsequent events had kept him afoot since. But now his limbs were like lead; his legs bent beneath him as he made his way to the main staircase; and only the thought of what powers of darkness were held in check by his continuing activity served to spur him past his bedroom door.

Could he but devise some means of keeping the Count of Albany up all night —

Footfalls weighted by a heavy burden scraped and thudded on the tiled floor of the entrance hall below. Then at least they had carried O'Hara up from the court. Sterne forced his watery knees to bear him swiftly down the stairs, lest the young man should be put down in any place convenient for secret disposal, such as a room on the first floor would be. But the little group was already straining up the stairs when he reached it: the marquis and Jules with arms locked under the body, while one of the servants who had served the supper embraced the lifeless legs. The rolling head and the hands that struck and swung from step to step showed dreadfully how all efforts to restore consciousness had failed. Behind followed the count, bearing in both hands one of the great candelabra from the table, and stopping continually to readjust the brandy bottle that slipped and slipped beneath one arm.

Sterne relieved him of it, but to save his life he could not have borne another ounce up the long flights. As it was, he had to rest as often as the others did, and it cost him a supreme effort to pass them at the top, to hurry to his chamber door, unlock and throw it open. There only would O'Hara be safe for the night; and it was impossible to imagine a pretext on which the offer of his bed for the purpose could be refused.

He went in to kindle the taper and had stepped back to the door, when a scurry of light feet sped

past him and Mademoiselle de Saint Pol du Var flung herself upon the body of her lover. Behind her the femme de chambre dropped the portmanteau and dressing-case beside the wall and flashed at Sterne a glance insolent with triumph.

The smile of the marquis reflected her elation. Perforce, at the young girl's onslaught he and Jules had put down their burden, Jules supporting O'Hara's head and shoulders upon one knee while the marquis stood, stretching his great arms after their labor.

"Put mademoiselle's luggage back in monseigneur's dressing-room," he directed.

But, quick as the woman was to obey him, Sterne was before her at the door of the count's apartment.

"Water!" he exclaimed, and vanished within. She did not follow him. It may well be that she was the reverse of desirous to be alone with him at that moment.

He was gone an astonishing length of time for so simple an errand as fetching a ewer of water; and when finally he did reappear, with the count's own small silver toilette pitcher bound with ivory bands, he seemed to have executed the task rather clumsily. His shoes and stockings were splashed, his hands dripping. But, as he paused to wring the water from the lace ruffles at his wrists, his face expressed a singular satisfaction. Meanwhile, the waiting-woman had set the luggage by the door and had devoted herself to the attempt to persuade her young mistress away from the side of Sterne's bed, to which O'Hara had by that time been carried.

Without a word Sterne handed the pitcher to Jules, pushed past the busy group that clustered at the bedside, and, undeterred by the fact that the heir of all the Stuarts stood gnawing his fingers and shifting from one foot to the other, the image of impotent anxiety, he dropped into a chair by the open window. Evidently the marquis had the situation well in hand. With some muttered instructions he sent the hotel servant for a trustworthy physician. He directed Jules about bathing O'Hara's temples and moistening the young man's lips with brandy, showed mademoiselle's waiting-woman how to keep the patient's head wrapped in cool wet towels, and restrained the terror-stricken young girl when her frantic caresses would have deprived her lover of the little air left him by the presence of so many people in that small room. When twenty minutes had elapsed without the return of the servant or the arrival of the doctor, he led Jules outside the door to give him most careful directions for finding another physician. This done, he ordered the waiting-woman to prepare the small bed in the count's dressing-room for her mistress's use, and began to urge upon the count the advisability of seeking repose.

"Bleeding will speedily restore our young friend here," he announced with an assumption of hearty confidence; "and when the surgeon comes, he will be able to do his work quite as well with only Jules and me to help him."

The maid was gone at the word; after a decent show of solicitous reluctance the count followed;

and, save for his unconscious victim and the clergyman, the marquis was alone with the object of his avarice and desire. On her knees beside the bed, the girl stretched her lithe body upon her lover's, cradling his head in her hands. Her cloak had fallen back; and the marquis let his eyes batten on her bare arms and shoulders, all rosy shadow and ivory high-light in the gleam of the candles. That treasure was as good as in his hands now. A little persuasion and tact should suffice to get her into the dressing-room. Or if not, let him but get rid of this meddling nuisance of a parson, and a man of his experience with women —

With an effort he wrested his glance away from his quarry to estimate this last remaining obstacle to his will. The troublesome fellow seemed to be fumbling over some sort of case of small bottles which the marquis remembered to have cast aside during his search earlier in the evening. Now, under the marquis's eye, he undid the elaborate stopper of one of them, made a ball of his handkerchief in his left hand and appeared to be pouring a quantity of the contents into the fine cambric folds. If he did not then hold the handkerchief to his nose, later events made the marquis think that he had seen him do so, for it seemed quite evident that the vial contained the same powerful stuff that filled Sterne's smelling-bottle. So that was the fellow's game! His miserable strength exhausted, he was bracing himself for further interference by this heroic application of the stimulant.

"This young lady ought to be in bed," said the marquis, addressing him in tones out of which he tried in vain to keep the ring of eagerness. "Will you be good enough to remain in observation of our patient while I place her in the hands of her maid?"

The clergyman made no reply. With eyes preternaturally large and dark, he continued to stare straight before him out of a bloodless countenance. His lips were set and he breathed through his nose so deeply and strongly that the marquis could hear him across the dim room. He must be very ill, for that stuff seemed mortal slow in acting. His bony limbs and emaciated body huddled in so grotesque an attitude of prostration that the idea of interference from such a scarecrow became absurd.

The Marquis de Sain'terre had always been a worshiper of brute force. His love of it had kept him what he was, needy adventurer, jackal to a discredited pretender, while other exiles, less gifted in many ways, had risen to opulence and power in every country of Europe. He adored it above all other means, and the opportunity to use it invariably went to his head. It did so now. He looked down at the girl, and the sense of his dominion over her made him giddy. To be sure, she might scream. That is, she might try to. He had handled women too often to be troubled by that possibility. They were astonishingly like spirited horses — women: the very devil for the inexpert, but tractable enough, docile, even responsive to the knowing touch.

He dropped on one knee beside her, one great arm

curved above her waist, the other ready to slide between her breast and the body of her lover, when those hovering lips of his should burn the nape of her white neck where the tumbling hair divided. Then a dozen swift strides down the corridor, her mouth pressed tight to his shoulder; that sharp waiting-wench quick with the dressing-room door and as quick to get out of it herself — A sort of hunter's ague shook his great frame so that he had to check himself and blink.

A firm touch on the shoulder made him start. He turned to find that the clergyman had stepped noiselessly past him and now stood with his back against the panels of the door, while in his eyes and on his close-set lips was a smile so unpleasant that the marquis scrambled to his feet with a smothered oath. Sterne neither spoke nor moved. Only his smile vanished as the marquis measured the distance between them with his eyes and swung back his great right fist for a single annihilating blow. Rigid on his legs, chin lifted, arms behind him to grasp the door-handle, Sterne stood in the worst possible position to receive it. Then his knees began to bend slowly; a look of terror distended his dark eyes, twisted his locked lips. One hand whipped his handkerchief to his mouth, flew wide, as his body sagged forward from the waist; and he pitched, face downward, upon the floor.

The marquis had had a glimpse of a chin stained bright red; he marked the handkerchief splotched with the same hue, lying where it had fallen from

Sterne's nerveless fingers; it recalled the fear with which Sterne had examined its folds at the auberge by the St. Lazare gate that afternoon. But the thing had been so sudden, so sinister in its quietness, that, accustomed though he was to scenes of blood, he could only stand and stare at the prostrate form. A knock on the door, peremptory and twice repeated, brought him only partially to his wits. He dragged Sterne's body aside and opened the door a cautious four inches. Bare-legged and clad in a spotted dressing-gown, the Count of Albany thrust his petulant face into the aperture.

"Body of God, Jack," he complained, "has not Jules returned yet? The great ewer of water has been emptied into my bed and the mess covered with the counterpane. I all but rolled into it."

"Take my bed, sir. Take my bed," begged the marquis impatiently, blocking the opening with his body. What he was going to do with the bleeding wretch at his feet he did not know, but to have his master scolding and wailing over this latest catastrophe seemed more than he could bear to think about at the moment.

"So I should have done without troubling you," the count retorted, "but your bed is wetter than mine, — the jordans have been emptied into it, — and mademoiselle's maid tells me that the bed in the dressing-room is like a swamp."

"Cannot the slut rouse the housekeeper — demand dry bedding?" snarled the marquis.

"Rouse the housekeeper, for such a purpose, at

one in the morning, and our bill a week overdue? But who can have done such a thing, Jack? The maid? The girl herself?"

"Who?" the marquis burst out. "Why, who but your miserable, meddling parson, your distinguished churchman and man of letters! Look at him now!" The air of righteous indignation with which he threw open the door could not have been more genuine if he had been convinced that Sterne had brought on a hemorrhage from the lungs by an act of will and for the special purpose of thwarting him.

"No noise! No outcry!" he added tensely, as the count recoiled in horror. "I did n't do it. I did n't touch him. 'T is what the doctors call *défluxion poitrine*. He 's had it before, he told me," he added, as if to reassure himself as much as for his master's sake.

Sterne indeed presented a spectacle that might have daunted men with consciences more innocent than theirs. Apparently in an attempt to rise, he had rolled to the wall, and now lay with head and shoulders propped against the baseboard, cheeks and chin drabbled, his neckcloth a scarlet smear. Under their combined gaze he began to writhe. His contorted features took on a horrible semblance of smothered mirth. Dreadful guttural sounds issued from his mouth. For five long minutes the count and the marquis were treated to an exhibition of all the horrors of death by choking.

"If Jules would only return with the physician!" wailed the count.

"Physician," sneered the marquis with the bitterness of a man who sees himself tripped by his own cleverness. "It will be long before Jules returns with a physician."

"But someone is coming. Listen!"

Lights, in fact, were flashing below the window; steps sounded on the pavement of the court; there was a babble of voices. Simultaneously the movements of the sufferer grew less violent; his starting eyes closed; his head fell upon one shoulder; and his breast heaved with one long, full breath after another.

"Had n't we best lay him on the bed?" the count suggested. "It might seem strange to a physician — Peste!" The sight of the girl, whom he had forgotten completely in the excitement of the last few minutes, wrung the exclamation from him. Oblivious of all that had passed, she continued to kneel in passionate vigil over her lover's unconscious form. "She must be got out of sight, at least."

"There will be no physician, I tell you," the marquis fumed, "unless I find Jules and send him for one now. Do you think I wanted a physician, when I had only too many people to get rid of already? I simply told Jules to keep out of the way."

"You made very free with Jules, it seems to me."

At his master's tone of grave displeasure, so different from the unbridled petulance which is itself a sign of royal favor, the marquis started. Often in his life had he heard it, old hanger-on at courts that he was, had heard the ensuing silence, like that of

summer song-birds at the sudden occultation of the sun, and seen its victim freeze beneath it; and a chill presaging the blight of all his hopes robbed him of the power to defend himself. Moreover, the count held up his hand, enjoining silence.

Steps sounded along the corridor from the direction of the main staircase, but too many at once to be those of Jules. It sounded as if newly arrived guests — ladies, by the lightness of their feet — were being ushered to their chambers. But they stopped just outside the door, and it was Jules's voice, in low and earnest protest, that penetrated to the ears of the two gentlemen, whose eyes interrogated each other in amazement and alarm behind it. A woman's voice cut him short, a woman's voice speaking English with the high, hectoring clarity of the Englishwoman of gentle birth. After so many hours of tense whisperings it seemed to shatter the stillness into a thousand tinkling fragments.

"Don't be absurd, my good man," it enunciated. "You are not trying to keep me out of my husband's room, I hope."

"This is indeed the chamber of the English gentleman, of Monsieur Sterne, is it not?" another female voice inquired, speaking in French.

"Good God, 't is the Walkinshaw!" gasped the Marquis de Sain'terre. He made a step as if to lock the door, to keep it shut at all costs. But a marvel checked him. Swiftly, lightly, Sterne rose from the floor and confronted him with a countenance smiling with triumph.

"Red ink, you blundering dolt!" he grinned in the nobleman's stupefied face. "And you watched me pour it into my handkerchief! Just a squeeze did the rest, since you had never seen a real hemorrhage from the lungs."

He flung the door open.

"Bess dear!" he cried. "Lydia, my dear child, how in the world —"

To the routed senses of the Marquis de Sain'terre a wave of petticoats seemed to flood the room. The bicker of female voices, shrill with reproach, anxiety, and solicitude, deafened him. A woman like a grenadier thrust him from her path to fling herself upon the breast of the Count of Albany, over whose shoulder her great black eyes scorched him with the fires of her hatred and contempt. A pretty young girl clung to one of Sterne's hands, while a woman of about his own age, not handsome but of striking dignity and evident breeding, embraced him and dabbed at his stained chin with a pocket handkerchief, incredulous of his smiling protestations. Mademoiselle de Saint Pol du Var had risen to her feet. It is possible that she was inspired by the hope of assistance from this reënforcement of her own sex; or, delicately sensitive to her audience, like all persons in an hysterical state, she may have felt that the pose of statuesque tragedy was ill calculated to impress these new spectators. At all events she was pulling her robe de chambre over her shoulders and patting her hair into some sort of order.

"Mesdames, mesdames," she begged, and the

vibrant tones of her deep voice made a silence for her, "if you have any influence here, will you not send for a physician for this poor gentleman?"

It struck Sterne, how the squalor of the girl's appearance suddenly obscured her beauty as the eyes of the older women turned upon her. Neither of them showed the slightest sign that they had heard her words; and his anger began to glow as his wife's glance sought that of the other in the masonic understanding of their sex. Considering the presence of this person, ran the message, the sooner the situation is put on a regular basis the better. She turned to him.

"My dear Laurence," said she, "I must do you the honor to present you to our friend and benefactress, Mrs. Johnson. When the diligence broke down, as it did about sunset, Mrs. Johnson was so kind as to give us places in her chaise.

"Was it not fortunate," she went on, when Sterne had bowed to the lady's profound acknowledgment of the introduction, "that Mrs. Johnson chanced to be traveling to meet her husband here, and that thus we were able to arrive at a moment when our presence was so desirable?"

Had her eyes been less busy reënforcing the implication of her words by a swift inventory of the disordered room, the thick growth of sandy hair on the count's gaunt shanks, the battered man on the bed, and the disheveled girl, she might have noticed how the face of her benefactress had turned a sudden, bricky red. Sterne did not miss that occurrence.

But if the lady had showed one sign of kindness a moment before, it would have been the farthest from his desire to add to her embarrassment. Even now, though his wife held so many advantages over him, though he knew that she would make him pay for all the discomforts of the diligence, to which she had subjected herself and Lydia in retaliation for his desertion, he hesitated till he had glanced again at Mademoiselle de Saint Pol du Var. She still maintained gallantly her attitude of dignified entreaty, but she was biting her under lip to hold back the starting tears. His anger flamed at the sight.

"My dear," he smiled, "permit me to return the compliment by presenting you to the Count of Albany. Monseigneur, may I have the honor?

"Charles Edward, my dear, the Young Pretender," he added in a whisper, lest she miss the significance of the title.

There she had it, fairly between the eyes, ran his vindictive thought. For if the words left her in any doubt that her "Mrs. Johnson," her benefactress, was none other than the notorious Clementina Walkinshaw, the prince's mistress, the reputed evil genius of his exile, the thought of the lady's proprietary attitude toward him from the moment she entered the room must quickly dispose of it. Let her make what she could of the fact that she had exposed her daughter for hours to the company of such a person in the close confinement of a post chaise!

To his amazement, she rose from her deep court courtesy, beaming.

"Your Royal Highness!" she exclaimed joyfully. "I never dreamed of such good fortune. Mr. Lawson Trotter —" She opened the large reticule that hung from her wrist and extracted a bulky packet. "Mr. Lawson Trotter did me the honor to entrust me with this for your Royal Highness, when, after writing to you, it occurred to him that it would be improper to ask such a service of one in my husband's official position."

She placed the packet in the count's eager hands and turned upon the stupefied countenance of her husband a smile of angelic blandness. The count was smiling also. His long fingers tore off the binding cord and broke through the heavily sealed wrapper to touch the crisp little bale of bank notes within. The transforming power of money shone in his face and bearing. Even a prince is not quite himself with empty pockets. He returned thanks to the bearer of this sorely needed succor with a courtly grace which transcended even his deplorable dishabille. He turned quickly and charmingly to Mademoiselle de Saint Pol du Var.

"My dear child, since you have just heard my name, will you dispense with ceremony and allow me to present these ladies, Mademoiselle Clementina Walkinshaw and Madame Laurence Sterne? Mademoiselle de Saint Pol du Var, ladies, the granddaughter of the Duc de Vence and the fiancée of the young gentleman on the bed, Monsieur Donat O'Hara, a lieutenant in Berwick's Irish regiment, who unfortunately received an injury some hours ago — and

for whom, my dear," he added, taking the young girl's hand, "we will now make it our business to obtain a physician. Jules!"

The valet started forward, eager to be among the first to trim his sails to the changing wind, but the Marquis de Sain'terre stepped in front of him. Ignored in the corner of the room into which he had been driven, the baffled plotter had been at a loss to know how either to assert himself or to slip away. Now it seemed to him that something might yet be saved from the ruin of his plans if he could weather this squall and catch Charles Edward alone in the morning. As for the girl, she knew nothing of the plot he had made against her, and his particular experience with women led him to believe that his having felled her lover with a single blow was as likely to evoke her admiration as her hate.

"If your Royal Highness will allow me to say a word," he suggested, bowing low, "what with having dry beds prepared, Jules will be more than sufficiently busy. Meanwhile I will fetch the doctor."

"Oh, no, no! Not that man! Monseigneur, I beseech you." Mademoiselle de Saint Pol du Var would have knelt in the fervor of her supplication if the count had not restrained her.

"Have no fear, my child," he reassured her with a smile. "We know what ill success Monsieur le Marquis de Sain'terre has in obtaining the services of medical men."

He slipped a note from the packet and handed it to Jules.

"Rouse the housekeeper and give her that with the necessary instructions."

"Then you will permit me to withdraw, sir?" the marquis blustered.

The count gave him an unpleasant smile.

"Unless you prefer to remain until we are *quite* sure we have no further need of your services."

"Your Royal Highness," said Mrs. Sterne, as the discomfited nobleman stepped sullenly back to his corner, "Mr. Trotter begged me to add something more to his message: namely, that the sum I have handed you is less by twenty pounds than the amount mentioned in his letter. Miss Walkinshaw had waited upon him with a request for funds to enable her to join you, and in the circumstances he conceived that it would be in accordance with your desires to have her do so."

It was now the count's turn to look amazed.

"In accordance with my desires?" burst from his lips. He added hastily, "Of course I am delighted that he should have guessed my wishes, but how he did so —"

"I went to Trotter and told him I must know your whereabouts and fetch you home. Our child was ailing, and I needed your advice and support, Charles," Miss Walkinshaw explained, snuggling against her lover's side. A pouting Juno! thought Sterne, and decided that she could have been a hardly less delectable spectacle when she was domineering over little, mild Mr. Trotter. But the count appeared to like it.

"And how was the dear child, when you left her?" he asked, slipping his arm about her ample shoulders for a playful squeeze. "Better, I know, and in good hands, or her mother would not be here."

The Marquis de Sain'terre had been an inattentive auditor of the greater part of this conversation. Lest his thoughts should not be occupied unpleasantly enough, Jules from the threshold had flung him the glance which the disillusioned follower keeps for the leader who has failed. But the count's last words roused him. Their tone of besotted uxoriousness slew his still writhing hopes like a coup de grâce. His eyes sought the open window and instinctively measured the distance to the flagstones of the courtyard below.

"Mademoiselle," Sterne was saying gayly to the richest heiress in France, "when the physician has put this young man to rights, will you condescend to share my daughter's bed? Your maid —"

"The maid may have Jules's little room," interrupted the count benevolently. "Clementina, you will take Rumbold's, naturally. Be so good as to have your things taken out of it, Monsieur le Marquis. Doubtless the hotel people can squeeze you in somewhere, since it will be for this night only."

CHAPTER VI

SMOKING FLAX

"For God alone knows who is a hypocrite and who is not."

L. Sterne: *Letters.*

Eroded by the feet of generations of travelers, the broad flight of shallow stone steps leading up from the courtyard of the Hôtel de l'Univers ended on a tiled platform of commodious proportions in front of the principal entrance. Here at half-past ten next morning Sterne reclined in a long chair and breathed gratefully the last traces of the coolness of the night which were still imprisoned by the high surrounding walls. Beyond the shortening shadows the flagstones blazed in the glare of another day of blistering heat; and it amused him in his comfortable lassitude to imagine that he saw steam arise from them as the servant who was drenching the pavement with a great watering pot dashed its shower into the sunshine. In the far corner, scene of so much tentative villainy so short a while back, the orange trees had been rearranged in a less jealous pattern. The sight of a gay awning stretched over the space behind them, and of several lacqueys dressing a table with the traditional decorations of a wedding breakfast, ministered to his sense of well-earned content.

Except that departure was the thing farthest from his thoughts, *Nunc dimittis* expressed his feeling of fulfillment, and half unconsciously he hummed under his breath a favorite arrangement of the canticle by the gifted Dr. Arne. He had endured the rigors and exertions of the preceding night with no more serious consequences than extreme fatigue; he had foiled the doers of iniquity — better still, he had understood them, or believed he did; and, unlikely as such an event had appeared eight hours earlier, the wedding party had already left the hotel for the Church of St. Gregoire.

The bridegroom had responded to the first application of skilled surgical treatment with the promptitude of one whose profession implies the taking of hard knocks as a matter of course. A few hours' sleep had done wonders for him. Aside from his interesting pallor and the dark circles beneath his handsome eyes, the edge of a white bandage that showed below his freshly curled wig was the only sign of his misadventure which he presented to the proud and anxious gaze of his bride. More than ever delicious in her bodice of stiff white satin and her veil crowned with rosebuds, Mademoiselle de Saint Pol du Var clung to his arm. Now that only a few steps along the sunny street lay between her and the fruition of her desires, she had even relaxed into a smile as she stopped to tell Sterne of her regret that he did not feel strong enough to come to see her married. It was too much the smile of the devotee, of the novice going to receive the tonsure, to please him altogether;

but time and nature would cure that. Behind her, as bridesmaid, followed his own dear Lydia in her simple finery, with the idolatrous eyes of a schoolgirl for one who is about to enter upon the supreme adventure of her sex. His wife, a bland personification of the proprieties, marshaled the little procession forth, gracious, sedately sympathetic — in a word, at her best.

Under the rug with which she had insisted on covering him Sterne stretched his bony legs luxuriously. The rug was quite superfluous on such a day, but he liked its warmth. He liked the fact that his linen was crisp and spotless, that he was wearing his black satin breeches in honor of the forthcoming festivity. It occurred to him that Providence manages its rewards not less neatly than its punishments. He had risked health and reputation and — though he refused to admit the thought — possibly life itself, to bring these two young people together in wedlock; and his wife's interest in the wedding was undoubtedly what had made her so ready to recognize that matters stood at quits between herself and him. She had indeed offered one criticism on hearing his account of the night's adventures. It seemed to her, she said, that instead of acting the buffoon and Rabelaisian jackanapes — this was when he told her of soaking the beds — he would have done better to rouse the people of the house in defense of the girl, or even to call the watch. Supposing they all had landed in the police court, — as he said they would, but she did n't believe, — he need only to have shown his letters of

introduction. He had replied that a person so involved was in no position to solicit the notice of the personal representative of the Vicar of Christ on earth, times having changed since Peter himself was but too well acquainted with the insides of jails. It was the kind of retort that would have made her furious ordinarily, the kind in which she could see neither wisdom nor wit, but only blasphemy. He ought to have countered with her having abused her position as the wife of a clergyman of the Church of England by running errands for the pretender to the English throne. She made no reply, and he had been bracing his exhausted nerves to endure that deadly weapon, her silence, when he heard her begin to wonder aloud whether there was any shop in Avignon where a bridal veil could be purchased ready-made.

By eight o'clock in the morning she had been into the town to find out, and had returned, flushed with heat and success, trailing yards of tulle and lace and a seamstress still voluble with protests. The fact that Mademoiselle de Saint Pol du Var's femme de chambre proved to be unaccountably missing had only spurred her to greater efforts. Having got her husband comfortably ensconced on the steps, on the pretext that he must have the benefit of the open air before the heat of the day became intolerable, she had turned their chamber into a grand headquarters of hymeneal preparation. Thence she had directed the half-ecstatic, half-distracted labors of Lydia and the sewing-woman over the toilette of the bride in the next room; there she had interviewed O'Hara and the *maître*

d'hôtel together as to the wedding breakfast; thither she had not hesitated to summon the Count of Albany himself, and, having settled it in her own mind that his exalted birth alone could lend the proper air of dignity to this runaway marriage, had prevailed upon him to give away the bride, and had got around both his fears for his incognito and her own unwillingness to have Miss Walkinshaw appear in public as a member of the bridal party by suggesting that he avoid the curiosity that would be attracted to the wedding procession in the streets by escorting his lady to the church a half hour in advance of the others.

Since his agreement with the marquis had been abrogated by the outcome of their wager, more than one dram of brandy, even at that hour of the morning, contributed doubtless to the holiday mood in which he yielded to the contagion of her enthusiasm. But as yet it had gone no further than to liberate the impulse to beneficent graciousness which was so much more congenial to his nature than the strenuous self-discipline and sordid indirection to which he had lately been committed. Jules's morning ministrations had made good in his appearance the ravages of the night. He led Miss Walkinshaw out upon the steps with a bearing that would have done credit to the bridegroom himself.

Ahead of him, with ceremonial stiffness, marched the Marquis de Sain'terre. All morning, as Sterne knew, he had been loitering inside the door to make this fresh assay of the princely favor. In his capacity

of equerry or chamberlain, or whatever he conceived his office to be, he stalked down the steps as if a guard of honor and a throng of spectators waited there, halted smartly and faced inward, his hand twitching to rise to the salute. Thus he remained while the count paused beside Sterne's intricate arrangement of rugs and cushions, laid a hand on the invalid's thin shoulder to prevent him from rising, gave him a smiling account of the festive preparations, and generally indulged himself in the leisurely exercise of a magnanimous condescension toward this unfaithful subject to whom the princely bed itself had not been sacred.

Through all this Sterne managed to keep one eye for the great, baffled wretch below. No Jules had labored over his appearance. If the hotel people had squeezed him in anywhere for the remainder of the night, according to the languid expectation of his master, the wrinkles in the marquis's clothes suggested that it was in some place where he had not thought it best to undress; and the fact that he had shaved was advertised chiefly by a deep triangular cut on his chin. Sterne saw his hard cheeks redden under the malicious glance of Miss Walkinshaw's black eyes, when at length she trailed past him on her lover's arm; and he heard in response to his crisp "Any orders, sir?" the count's cutting "We do not require your attendance further, Monsieur le Marquis."

"If it will not interfere with your preparations for your own departure, you might make sure that the

people here understand Jules's order for a post chaise at three o'clock to take Miss Walkinshaw and me back to Paris," the count returned negligently. "But pray consult your own convenience before doing so."

There was that which touched Sterne in the attitude of the discarded creature as he watched the pair saunter past the obsequious Swiss at the gate. The count in one of his outbursts of sentimentality the night before had called the marquis a faithful mastiff. Certainly he could never have appeared so like one as now. Nothing else animate could have looked at the same time so strong and so crushed. Here was no mere courtier disappointed of princely favors, but a man who saw his darling project, for which he would have spent his life gladly, ruined beyond repair. For Sterne the spectacle shed a light over all his actions of the past eighteen hours. He leaned forward impulsively.

"Sir John — Sir John Rumbold," he called, "will you oblige me with a few moments of your time?"

The marquis turned with a snarl, but at Sterne's grave glance, charged, it seemed, with some secret implication, he ascended the steps with an attempt at his habitual swagger.

"You also are leaving Avignon, I believe," Sterne began.

"Thanks to your infernal meddling, sir, I am not even able to do that." The marquis's tone was grim, his eyes watchful. Sterne lay before him, a mere wreck to the eye, but he had had a sufficing experience of the audacity of that weakness.

"Can I be of service to you? Pray draw up yonder chair and sit down beside me." Sterne broke off as the other's incredulous gaze continued to search his face for the expected gleam of mockery. "You need not wonder at me. I have seen much of you since yesterday afternoon, I have guessed much more — enough at least to make me believe that your motives were not altogether those of the commonplace miscreant I took you for at first. That is a double-edged remark. Shall I apologize for the one side of it or the other? I cannot well do both." He paused, smiling whimsically.

"I do not think I am wrong," he went on, as the marquis made no reply, but continued to sit, frowning moodily at him. "Much as that girl and her fortune meant to you for their own sake, they meant something much greater, did they not? The way you stood just now, staring after that poor lion-skin stuffed with pretentions and princely graces — that made me understand, I believe, why, when you had the girl at your mercy in her chamber at the All Angels last evening, you — "

"By God," burst from the marquis, as if the words had been torn out of him by the passion of his disappointment, "I could have made a man of him, had I been let alone!"

Sterne shook his head.

"Pardon me, but God Himself had to have the dust of the ground before he could make a man. Whither do you wish to go?"

The marquis shrugged his great shoulders and

threw out both hands open in a gesture of impotence.

"Whither? To be gone is the great thing. O'Hara will not forget last night, and with his wife's money he can have me in the Bastille in a fortnight."

"I observed," said Sterne with apparent irrelevance, "that His Royal Highness is wearing his watch this morning."

"He probably sent Jules around with the money and the ticket before breakfast, now that he is in funds."

"But I observe that you are not wearing yours."

The marquis laughed harshly.

"Mr. Sterne, I take it you have had little dealings with princes in your time."

"You mean to tell me that, having lived off the proceeds of your property, he even dismisses you without troubling to redeem it when he is able?"

"Mr. Sterne," replied the marquis with lugubrious hauteur, "the motto of the Rumbolds of Cloisters is *Ex rege, pro rege, omnia*, and from father to son we have served the Stuarts since they became kings of England."

"And when the Stuarts no longer desire your service?"

"We wait."

"The Bastille strikes me as a poor place to wait in," Sterne commented drily. "But let me repeat my question. Whither would you go if you were free to choose?"

"Were I at Marseilles by the end of the week, I

could doubtless find passage paid on a ship sailing for Nouvelle Orléans in the colony of La Louisiane. A month ago I was offered employment there in a semi-military capacity at one of the posts up the Mississippi River, and the place did not sound so desirable that others would jump at it."

"Passage from here to Marseilles by boat should not be too heavy a drain on the purse," Sterne said tentatively.

"Not unless the purse happened to contain just three louis and four copper sous," the marquis returned brutally.

"I was speaking of my own purse," Sterne went on, unmoved. "Only you must believe that I am actuated by no desire to take advantage of your circumstances. On my honor, I have in mind nothing but some words I have read about not breaking a bruisèd reed nor quenching the smoking flax. Will you permit me to become your banker to the extent of the necessary sum?"

The marquis was a sentimentalist, like all men who pass for villains, and it is not in the heart of sentimentalist born of woman to refuse an offer of help made with such winning grace. And so it came about that Sterne had watched the departure of the little wedding procession fifteen minutes later with such deep contentment. There remained one other member of last night's dramatis personæ with whom he wished to deal. The motives and the future course of the femme de chambre teased his curiosity. The thought of her probable plight touched his wide char-

ity. But now the shadow of the building behind him had shrunk to the foot of the steps; the almost perpendicular rays of the sun had burned up the last of the coolness of the court; and the man with the watering pot had given up the unequal struggle, leaving the pavement a fantastic patchwork of oily blacks and arid greys. The air grew thick with heat; and Sterne had dropped into a light and delicious doze, when small shoes tapped the stones below him. He opened his eyes to see the handsome creature moving toward the gate from some service entrance in the *rez-de-chaussée*. There doubtless she had been hiding until the departure of the others should give her the opportunity to escape, for her broad straw hat was tied beneath her chin, she carried her cloak, and her free stride was impeded by the weight of a bundle knotted in the four corners of a kerchief and by a small and battered portmanteau that dragged at her right arm.

"*Bonjour, monsieur*," she called back civilly in answer to his hail, but she did not stop.

"Will you be good enough to come up here for a moment, mademoiselle?"

She hesitated, then somewhat to his surprise complied and stood looking down upon him with sullen eyes.

"Mademoiselle is leaving Avignon?"

"Did monsieur suppose that I was going to walk for pleasure in this heat?"

"Monsieur the lieutenant remembers little of what happened last night, mademoiselle, and knows little more of it than what his bride can tell him," said

Sterne, ignoring her hostility. "I had a talk with him before breakfast. He did not question me very closely, did not mention you at all, in fact; and I gathered that he was too well pleased with the outcome to interest himself greatly in the rest."

"And I had a talk with him after breakfast, monsieur," the girl retorted, "in which I made it unnecessary for him to question me at all. So monsieur's forbearance, for which no doubt he expects me to be duly grateful —"

"You mean you told him voluntarily —?"

"He forced me to, to make him understand why I would not continue in his wife's service."

"You would not? But you said last night —"

"How could I, monsieur?" cried the girl, her masque of sullen enmity suddenly gone. "Did not monsieur see to what lengths my feelings drove me when I seemed to have it in my power to ruin this marriage? Oh, I am not ashamed of what I tried to do. I regret only that I failed. But, feeling thus, could I go on, witnessing every day his happiness in her? It made me understand for the first time that I could not. So, lest I should be tempted to try, I told him all I had done, all I had tried to do; and lest he should find excuses for me in his vanity, I made him think it was the marquis's promises that tempted me. He is furious, naturally."

"Naturally." Sterne nodded. "And now, what will you do? You will get no character from your young mistress, of course. The Duc de Vence, your late employer —"

"Truly, monsieur gives himself too much concern about my small affairs." Already she had herself under control and once more faced him with hard eyes. "I shall manage."

"I should not be sorry to contribute to the success of mademoiselle's management."

"And why? Because it lessens monsieur's self-satisfaction to feel that his contact with some person has caused that person unhappiness? Believe me, had I succeeded last night, I would not have wasted a thought on what the consequences to monsieur might have been. Moreover, I am sufficiently well supplied with such assistance as monsieur could give. Monsieur will permit me to bid him adieu? There is a gentleman with whom I must have a word."

Her restless glance had been ranging the courtyard and now fixed itself on the Marquis de Sain'terre, who with a porter bearing his luggage had just reappeared below. She ran down the steps and intercepted him before he reached the gate. For a few minutes they stood in the blinding sunshine, conversing earnestly. Then she handed her bundle and portmanteau to the porter, and the two went out together, the man following.

Sterne was still staring at the empty arch when the sound of gay music caught his ear. The bridal party was returning from the Church of St. Gregoire. Fiddlers with white satin favors on hat and bow played them in.

LIFE'S ARREARS

"Let me be wise and religious — but let me be MAN . . . give me some companion in my journey, be it only to remark to, How the shadows lengthen as the sun goes down."

Sterne's Sermon on "The Levite and His Concubine."

I

"A poet in love must be encouraged in both capacities or neither." *Emma.*

He ought to have waited for a chair: this was a London February at its worst. It had been madness to suppose, as in his impatience to be quit of the scene of his discomfiture he had done, that he could pick up a hackney carriage in the street on such a day. At each empty stand he had peered vainly through the swirling vapor; and every public vehicle that loomed through the driving scud either showed itself jammed to the windows or signaled its preëmption by a surly shrug of the caped shoulders of its driver.

Meanwhile, with every step he made eastward the slush was deepening on the footway. Already the soles of his buckled shoes were half sodden. From time to time a jet of the icy mess spurted over the side of one or the other of them and, squeezed forward by the next step, added one more degree to the misery of his aching toes. The wind, which God knew should have been brisk enough to blow the streets clear, served only to drive through the town masses of fog to all appearance inexhaustible. The fog bore along with it the down-blowing smoke of a hundred thousand chimneys, so that every breath was laden

with sulphur and brimstone, and nose and eyes wept in mutual commiseration.

His foot slipped on a slimy kerb, and he fetched an unwary lungful of the poisonous mixture as he scrambled to recover his balance. At once those sensitive bronchial tubes of his set up their protest. He sought the shelter of a doorway and, back to the wind, his gloved hands screening his face, fought for control of the irritated membranes. Let one of his paroxysms get started in this grating air, and the end might well be in his coffin. The actuality of the danger was reflected in the grim look on his sharp, white features, when at length, reassured by a cautious inspiration, he once more made head against the storm. With influenza decimating the two kingdoms, every moment was perilous until he could reach his lodgings and don dry clothes. But endurance rather than determination characterized the pace and attitude with which he went forward. Beneath the bent brim of his modish tricorn hat the single spot of bright color that burnt high on either cheek was a signal of wreck — no battle lantern welcoming the fray. Shoulders bowed, chest contracted, the wind making brutal sport of the black silk tassels on the smart ebony cane beneath one arm, he thrust his hands deep into the side pockets of his greatcoat and added chagrin to physical discomfort by touching two reminders of his recent mortification.

The memory of the gleeful expectancy with which two hours before he had received the slim volumes from the hands of his publisher sharpened his sense of

disappointment. Becket himself had passed them to him across the table in the book-littered back room, as if by that personal act to emphasize his esteem and that of his partner for the new book which would go into the world on the morrow sponsored by two hundred and eighty-one of the noblest and most distinguished names in the kingdom. To escort to his waiting chair the author who was the friend or acquaintance of almost every one of the bearers of those illustrious names had not been too much. Then, too, there had come that feeling — which custom could never stale — of something miraculous in the transmutation of his scratched and interlineated manuscript into these graceful creations of elegant typography and sumptuous paper. Not very different, it had occurred to him, must be the feelings of the father of a lord chancellor or minister of state, watching his son's august activities and recalling the while the unsavory, unlikely infant for whose life he once schemed and strove. But he had no need to go so far afield for a comparison. He had smiled complacently down upon his faultless attire as the chair swung along. The contrast between the volumes and their embryo was no more startling than that between his present self, the urbane, sophisticated clerical exquisite, the Anglican counterpart of the Parisian abbé, and that rustic parson, that "lousy prebendary"— the phrase was his own — who had first taken his seat in the chancel of York Cathedral.

But from the moment he entered Lady Percy's withdrawing room he had known that, though he

came by appointment, his arrival was ill timed. Nor was he made aware of this alone by the presence of the titled young booby of a guardsman who lolled on one of the spindly chairs and seemed uncertain whether to look grave and censorious or knowing and sly when his hostess introduced him to the Reverend Mr. Sterne, the author of *Tristram Shandy* and of "such a clever book of travels" which would appear on the morrow.

"But I've forgotten the name of it," she wailed. "Don't hate me for forgetting, Yorick! This weather has made me so dull."

Warned by the veiled annoyance in her tone, he would have retreated even then. Indeed he had made a movement to do so. But she had espied the books in his hand; and, all melting eyes and teasing lips though she made herself, Anne Stuart, Lady Percy, whom society delighted to spoil, had a will not lightly to be thwarted in her own house.

"*A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy*," she had read off. "Of course. How thoughtful of you to bring them, Yorick! I love to have things before other people do." (As if she had n't been pretending to count the days until he could bring them to her!)

And with a gesture unmistakably definitive she had laid them out of his reach on a red lacquer table and turned to beg the young Adonis in scarlet to continue the narrative of palace scandal which the entrance of the luckless author had interrupted.

As Sterne splashed along, he managed to extract a

sardonic amusement from the thought of his manner of extricating himself and his precious volumes from her net. For in no such casual manner was it meet that the gift of the new book of the most fashionable author in London should be received on the day before its publication. The journey through it must be made a sentimental journey indeed, with himself as courier, or it should not be made by Lady Percy. So when, after a decent interval, he had risen to take his leave, he had lightly said as much, repossessed himself of the books with smiling aplomb, and bowed himself out, all gay urbanity to the eye, though inwardly so consumed by mortification that he stood over his shoes in the melting snow of the street before prudence sounded the alarm of danger to his health.

And now the memory of the episode began to disturb him. Did it indicate that his popularity was waning? As no woman of fashion chose her satellites with a nicer appreciation of the noise they happened to be making in the world, none was more sensitive than Lady Percy to the smallest diminution of their notoriety. His countenance grew graver than before. For upon his personal popularity depended in large measure the success of his books, and upon their sale depended in still larger measure the means with which to meet the demands of an exigent wife and the needs of a daughter who had reached the age to be properly launched in the world.

"Mr. Sterne, your humble servant, sir.'

"Good afternoon, Mr. Sterne."

Even in the storm-swept waste of Piccadilly he was

being saluted and greeted an astonishing number of times, considering the fewness of foot passengers of any condition. So much was to the good, at least. He was tempted to turn back to St. James's Coffee House to take the public pulse among the men of wit and fashion who were sure to be whiling away the end of the dull afternoon there. But the saturated state of his garments forbade. So, turning at the corner of Old Bond Street, he made for the golden *perruque* that swung and creaked in the blast above the wigmaker's shop at Number 41, over which he had his lodgings.

It was well that he had not deviated from the direct road home, he told himself so soon as he entered the little vestibule. For, the journey accomplished, his strength incontinently deserted him. The stairs rose before him, for the moment insurmountable. The pain of his frigid feet struck at his vitals, filling him with a deadly faintness. There would be a fire in the back room of the shop, and a chair in which Mrs. Chard, his landlady, would be glad to let him rest. He opened the door on his left, nodded to the fresh-faced apprentice girl who was engaged in lighting the lamps, — for the stormy twilight was already coming on, — and had all but reached the little back room, half countingroom, half snuggery, when the sound of voices from the open door brought him to a halt.

"The book might be all that you think it," came in a man's angry tones from within, "and still be no fit reading for my wife, especially in her present con-

dition. In point of fact, I find it full of such cheap nastiness and filthy innuendoes that any decent woman must blush to find herself reading them even in her closet. Here, take it back while I can let my hand give it you. Had it been mine, I had cast it into the fire after reading the first chapter."

"I'm sure I'm very sorry, Mr. Arthur," Mrs. Chard's voice replied contritely. "I see now it was no book for me to lend to your pretty young wife. Indeed and indeed, I cannot think how I came to do it. Unless it was having had so many myself, and all perfectly natural like, I clean forgot those bits about Doctor Slop and forceps and heads and broken noses and — "

"Silence, woman, in God's name!" cried the man's voice.

"Oh, Arthur, Arthur!" It was a young woman who made remonstrance. "Don't mind him; truly, Mrs. Chard, you must n't. I was n't frightened, really."

"I found you weeping into the grate!" Thus the indignant young husband.

"Oh, but not really frightened, Arthur, just indulging myself a bit for being away from home and you so long in coming back from Tilbury that I began to imagine you had had to embark without even saying good-bye. So you really must n't take it to heart so, Mrs. Chard." This in response to a subdued sniffling.

"But it was careless of me, dearie, and you expecting, as you are, so soon."

The young man cut short her admission of wrong-doing.

"But the whole miserable book! How could you?"

"Indeed and indeed, I don't know, Mr. Arthur. It was owing to having the author here in the house this winter and last, I suppose, and him such a merry, charming gentleman, whose conversation could n't hurt a babe, even when sick as he often is — and all the highest in the land, from his Grace the Duke of Grafton down to Mr. Garrick, thronging of his chambers every morning and carrying him off to dinner and the playhouse every night. And then his sermons, Mr. Arthur! Your pretty young dear shall read his sermons instead of the *Shandy* books. I have them all bound, which he gave to me. 'For Sundays when the weather's too bad for going to church, Mrs. Chard,' says he."

"The hypocrite!" burst from the young man.

Sterne had by this time retreated on tiptoe some distance from the door and now approached it with heavy steps, calling out: —

"Mrs. Chard, Mrs. Chard, may a poor devil of a scribbler who is too cold and tired to climb the stairs warm and rest himself for a few minutes at your fire?"

There came a smothered gasp of consternation and warning before he was cheerfully bidden to enter. In the doorway he had to draw back to permit the exit of a pale, pretty young woman, whose long cloak concealed her figure but whose bright eyes in passing

gave him a glance of intelligent curiosity. A tall young man in military scarlet shepherded her forth; and it seemed to Sterne that this ruddy giant lifted the officer's cloak that hung across his left forearm as if he would have shielded her from the proximity of contamination. No Methodist could have fixed the poor clergyman, shivering in his drenched finery, with a look of more severe disapproval.

Behind this young champion of propriety Mrs. Chard showed a scared face for a moment. Then she became voluble and active over Sterne's plight. Molly the maid was sent flying up to his bedchamber for slippers, dry stockings, and his quilted dressing-gown. She herself brought a basin of hot water, in which she insisted that he then and there immerse his icy feet. Molly brought down with her the inevitable handful of cards and notes which had come for him since he left the house at noon; and Mrs. Chard proceeded to deliver the oral messages which had been confided to her memory: Commodore James had called in the hope of carrying him to Gerrard Street for a family dinner, and Mr. Garrick had stopped in a hackney coach, desiring his presence at the theatre and a supper afterward.

These things off her mind, the good woman, with a transparency of artifice that moved him to smile, set herself to tell him about the young couple whose call he had interrupted, watching his face as she did so for any sign that he had overheard the discussion of which his book had been the subject. They occupied the chambers just above his own, it appeared,

and had done so for upward of five weeks now. But the young husband, Ensign Arthur Pym, was away the whole of every week with his regiment, which was momentarily expecting orders to embark for service in the North American Colonies, while his wife naturally kept much within doors, only taking needful exercise in the early morning and at dusk — facts which doubtless explained why Mr. Sterne had never encountered either of them on the stairs.

Mr. Sterne had perhaps heard of Sir Oliver Pym of Lincolnshire, the young gentleman's father, Mrs. Chard ventured to believe. Mrs. Chard had been in service in Sir Oliver's family for several years. Indeed it was while the family was in London for the season twenty years ago, and she the nursery maid at the time, that Chard had married her and, dying ten years after, had left her his business and the letting of lodgings in the house above. So, although she made it a rule to take only single gentlemen, Mr. Sterne would see that she could hardly refuse when her young Mr. Arthur came to her and begged her to house his pretty wife for the presumably short interval before he should take ship. So soon as he had sailed, the young lady was to have gone to her father's in Sussex. But the Government could never make up their minds apparently, — Mrs. Chard had had military gentlemen for lodgers before this and knew the vacillating ways of the War Office, — and here was the time dragging out till one could n't tell what to expect. At this point Mrs. Chard raised both

hands to indicate that her meaning was quite the opposite of her words and that a certain eventuality was by no means doubtful now.

"It must be an anxious time for the poor child, and lonely as well, with her husband away so much," Sterne agreed. The hot water which laved his feet to the ankle bones and the rich eggnog that was making leisurely progress from his glass to his stomach had done much to restore him.

"Has she books to read?" he asked with great seriousness. "Do you think my *Shandys* would amuse her?"

The good woman's confusion was so great that he regretted having given way to the impish impulse.

"I believe that I understood her to say that she had read *Tristram Shandy*," she managed after some stammering. "But I have promised to lend her your sermons, sir."

"By the way," said Sterne, taking one slender red foot out of the water and beginning to dry it, "I have asked Becket to put aside a set of my new tale for you, Mrs. Chard. She might find that useful to while away an hour."

His eye was caught by the two slim volumes which he had taken from his pockets and laid aside out of harm's way when he peeled off his sodden greatcoat. Impulsively his hand went out to them. They were not inscribed. Writing in them while a certain fair head bent above his shoulder and he inhaled the perfume of a certain delicious presence had been one of the anticipated pleasures of which he had been

disappointed that afternoon, and the thought of it gave him a certain perverse pleasure in what he now did.

"But why not take these, since I happen to have them with me?" he exclaimed. "Nay, my dear woman, —" for she began to protest against his giving her the work in so fine a dress, — "if that troubles you, you shall let me have your bottle of Dr. James's powders in exchange."

II

"The something of wretchedness that always hovers about love." *The Life of the Bee.*

As the closing act of a sentimental episode, there was an artistic completeness about presenting his landlady with the two volumes he had dedicated to his unappreciative inamorata, which sent Sterne up to supper in his chambers with a sense of thorough satisfaction. It soothed his wounded vanity; and he was not surprised that the hurt went no deeper. Even three years ago, when in the first flush of the affair he had written that "her eyes and lips have turned a man into a fool, whom the rest of the town is courting as a wit," he had also found it in his heart to write, "I must ever have some dulcinea in my head — it harmonizes the soul . . . but I carry on my affairs quite in the French way, sentimentally — '*l'amour*' (say they) '*n'est rien sans sentiment.*'" And, so begun, his infatuation had waxed, had waned at the epiphany of a more potent goddess, and at her departure — to rejoin a demanding elderly husband in India — had been puffed again into no more than a dying gleam. He was miffed, nothing more.

With that ironic gesture he had closed the door on the affair so completely that he was quite unconscious of inconsistency in sending Molly downstairs again to borrow back his recent gift. He had given the

book only the briefest examination in the bookshop. Now, his "dish of macaruls" and his boiled fowl digesting comfortably, he longed to go through the pages, testing their quality as one could never do in the crabbed manuscript or even in the long streamers of proof with the distracting thumb-prints on the margins. The sea-coal fire warmed his thin shanks, and a sip from the glass of mulled port at his elbow sharpened his faculties for fastidious enjoyment. There would be the pleasant flavor of favorite passages dressed in clear black type and served on thick, creamy paper, and the relish of others which his best efforts had left doubtful, now quite presentable or at worst no longer conspicuous in that elegant setting. But when the good, willing girl had left him with the volumes in his hands, a loose leaf slipped from the pages of the first and lay at his feet, face up in the glow of the firelight.

It was the "Advertisement" in which he acknowledged to his subscribers their claim upon him for two volumes more, "which nothing but ill health could have prevented him from having ready along with these." He knew the words so well that he could have repeated them from memory; but, as he picked up the leaf to restore it to its place, his glance was caught by the closing paragraph: —

> "The work will be compleated and delivered to the Subscribers early the next Winter."

It gave him a vague uneasiness. There was an unpleasant cocksureness about it, unmitigated by so

much as a formal D.V. "*Will be* compleated and delivered" and "*early* next winter." How did he know so much? He did n't even know where he himself would be early next spring. He took himself in hand before that imagination of his — which could be as morbid as you chose between his moods of exhilaration — should get possession of him. Why, had he been subservient to such forebodings, he would have been filling his niche beneath the pavement of Coxwold Church these years back! He heartened himself with the memory of his last winter's bout with death in these very chambers. Luck itself had been against him then. For after being relieved of twelve ounces of blood by his physicians, the bandage had slipped in the night, and he had lost a cruel amount besides. Upon that had followed his journey back to York in May, "a bale of cadaverous goods consigned to Pluto and company." So he had written to Hall-Stevenson from the midst of the seven gasping days he had taken, lying on the floor of his carriage, for the road over which he was accustomed to bowl blithely in two or three.

Somewhat cheered by these memories of past prowess, he returned to the examination of his book. But he went to bed early, dismissing all idea of dropping in at Mrs. Cornelys's great assembly at Carlyle House, for which Lord Ossory had left him a ticket; and, as he crawled in among the hot-water jugs, he gave more than his wonted attention to the reports which a man, often sick, knows how to extract from his various organs and members. There was no

denying that he had exposed himself with indefensible imprudence that afternoon.

Next morning, though he could assert stoutly that he had no cold, he was forced to admit that yesterday's misadventure had given him a dangerous feeling of exhaustion; and, with a lively memory of his illness last year, of bleedings and water-gruel worse than asses' milk, of the terrible corrosive mercury of Van Swieten and his own experiments with "L'Extraite de Saturne," he sent a note around to Sir Joshua Reynolds, to whom he had promised a sitting for his portrait, to say that he dared not venture out.

He passed a day of appalling dullness; and the next, a Saturday, was as bad. The weather had cleared with a hard, black frost. The shouts of boys on a slide before the door and an occasional crash as the horse of some unlucky carter or hackney coachman came to grief, told of the perilous state of the pavements, and explained why none of his usual callers dropped in. The post brought nothing but a few invitations, which in his depression he dared not accept, and a complaining letter from his wife, who was finding the winter climate of York bad for her health after her many years in France, and who had beguiled the time by stirring up a mare's nest about the disposition he would make of their daughter in case of her death. By Saturday night he was ready to believe that his *Sentimental Journey* had issued stillborn from the press, that he was already tasting the neglect resulting from its failure, and

that Lady Percy's defection had been indeed the outcome of true prescience.

Sunday morning found him in the utterly reckless mood of gaiety which had ever been his reaction to depressing circumstances. The weather had not improved; he felt little better in health; but he proceeded to carry out a round of prearranged entertainment to the last detail, breakfasted with Beauclerk, who was his friend in spite of being also the friend of Dr. Samuel Johnson, passed a cheerful hour with Lord Ossory, and went with George Selwyn to dine with Commodore and Mrs. James in Gerrard Street. There they had West's new portrait of their hostess to admire; Selwyn, who at Sterne's request had brought an Italian print or two for Mrs. James to copy, was at his grim wittiest; best of all, they told him that the whole town rang with the praises of his book; and he returned home, very tired but ready to smile at all his fears.

That night he dreamed that he stood — of all places! — in Little Alice Lane at York. Behind him, above the leafy treetops, soared the thrilling harmony of the Cathedral's south transept. To his right an archway marked one of the old gates of the Close. But these things were less seen than felt with the sense of long familiarity. Directly before him, every detail of its beautiful tracery sharp and clear to his vision, opened the door and wicket through which Eliza Lumley had tripped that fine Easter Monday morning, now close upon twenty-seven years ago, to become his wife.

"Return — return —" the words of a letter he had written to her during their courtship began lilting through his head. "Return — the birds of Yorkshire will tune their pipes, and sing as melodiously as those of Staffordshire."

He seemed to smell again the roses and jessamines which had sweetened many a sentimental repast within that house in the two years which it had taken to persuade her to marry him. But it was not she who now came through the door, but Mrs. Pym, wife of the censorious young ensign. Wearing no longer the telltale cloak, she exhibited an exquisite slenderness in a dress that suited the fine summer morning it appeared to be, and she moved with captivating grace. Only her expression was unchanged, pallid as he had seen her in reality; and to his deep bow she returned no more than the same look of interested intelligence she had given him in Mrs. Chard's doorway.

He awoke, with the feeling of puzzlement with which unaccountable dreams leave the dreamer, to find the light of another cheerless day prying at his curtains, and to hear Molly the maid kindling the fire in his sitting room. Consciously he had hardly thought of the ensign and his wife since his encounter with them. He had managed to avoid doing so. For, hardened though he had become to harsh and stupid criticism, it could hurt him still to learn that the young and high-spirited might find only dirt in the pages he had been at pains to pack full of wit and mirth. It depressed him that there were people

who began the world so drudgingly. And the young man's being a soldier made it worse. Imagine Captain Shandy with a taste and time for such squeamishness! Resolutely he put the young couple out of his mind and strove to keep them out, though hurried footsteps on the stairs and the bumping of a trunk indicated about mid-morning that Ensign Pym's regiment had got its embarcation orders at last.

With the boyhood memories of many a similar departure, Sterne could picture the melancholy scene of farewell in the rooms above his own, the look of dumb misery on the young husband's face, the steady smile in the young wife's swimming eyes, and the clutch of her passionate fingers. Left though she was to confront her coming ordeal alone, he could not imagine her swooning with grief after the fashion of the time. The one look at her face had been enough for that.

Amusement at a note from Lady Percy, complaining of his neglect and demanding her promised volumes, carried him through the day of these doleful beginnings. The mere existence of such a missive, moreover, confirmed all the good things which his friends had told him of the reception of his book by the town. Nevertheless he welcomed the sight of Mrs. Chard, who herself brought up his tray at teatime, and even asked about the young Pyms when he ran out of other excuses to keep her chatting. It appeared that he had been right about the young man's departure. But Mrs. Pym was staying on,

the roads being in no fit state for one in her condition to venture on the journey to her father's house away on the other side of Sussex.

"If anything was to happen here," as Mrs. Chard put it, she ventured to hope that Mr. Sterne would not allow it to disturb him. She knew him too well, she hurried on, to fear that he would not understand the position in which she was placed. Being a family man himself, he would, of course, be the last to think that the poor young lady could be turned out to seek other lodgings at such a time. If it came, it would be over in a few hours most likely; it almost always was, as few should know better than she. And what with her experience and the excellent midwife engaged, and Dr. Manningham only four streets away in case of trouble, and the walls so thick and all —

At length Sterne managed to put an end to her optimistic forecast by the blandest assurances of his sympathetic understanding of the situation. But her words left him the prey of old memories long laid to rest — he had hoped, forever. All night they haunted him, the thought of his first child, dead at birth, and of the second — now, to be sure, his dear Lydia. But the recollection of his helplessness through the bitter agony of her bearing lurked in the corners of his mind throughout the next day, and added to the misery of the solitude which the continuing fog and icy drizzle inflicted upon him. Had the weather been fine, however, he would not have dared to go out: certain well-remembered symptoms

had made it clear that he was in for a bout of influenza to pay for his indiscretions on Sunday. But, considering the success of his book, he passed the entire morning morbidly aware of every thud of the knocker below, hoping against reason that some friend zealous enough to brave the storm would call to congratulate him. Late in the afternoon, at the sound of footsteps in the passage, he sprang to his feet and opened the door.

It was young Mrs. Pym who had passed by, evidently, for she was leaning against the wall, in her long cloak, at the foot of the stairs that led up to her apartments, as if to recover her breath after mounting from the street; and he guessed that she had seized the opportunity to shed a few tears of loneliness before going on. Touched by the dejection of her attitude, he was yet hesitating as to whether the kindlier thing would be to offer her a seat by his fire or to close the door, pretending that he had not seen her in the dim light, when she turned and spoke.

"Oh, Mr. Sterne," she exclaimed, advancing quickly toward him with an unashamed movement of her handkerchief to eyes and cheeks. "Mrs. Chard will have told you who I am, I think," she added parenthetically, "Mrs. Arthur Pym? We owe you an apology, my husband and I, I am sure. The dreadful way we spoke of your book in your hearing the other night — Pray do not try to pretend you did not hear us." Sterne had raised his hands and opened his mouth to protest. "You were most gallant at the time, but your face could not quite

hide your feelings — at least from me. Will you forgive us? I swore I would beg you to when I had the opportunity. I have grown hot all over every time I have thought of it."

"My dear madam," said Sterne with his best bow, "a literary criticism in good faith is not a matter for forgiveness." Then, seeing that he had not set her mind at rest, he added, "Where there is no malice there can be no offense, and consequently nothing to forgive."

"But our stupid carelessness, to run the risk of hurting anyone! It was bad enough for Mrs. Chard. But Arthur is so upright, so honest, he forgets sometimes — I ought to have —" she had broken off, lest she seem not to be taking her share of the guilt, when Sterne interrupted her.

"I did not gather that you yourself attached any great blame to my poor book. May I say that that pleased me? I have always had the weakness to flatter myself that to the truly pure in heart —"

"Oh, but Arthur is that. My father, who does n't quite understand him, sometimes says he believes Arthur will die a Methodist," she broke in with her pretty eagerness. "But I must not keep you talking in this icy passage," she added, seeing that it was an effort to control a cough that had made him pause. "You do forgive us? Then I'll bid you good evening, Mr. Sterne."

"I still maintain that there can be no forgiveness where there has been no offense," he smiled, taking the soft hand she had held out impulsively and keep-

ing it while he went on. "But it is a nice point of ethics which I should be delighted to discuss before my fire. Come in. Pray do, I beg," he coaxed, as he saw the expression of polite refusal on her face change to one of doubt and inclination. "Take pity on an old man whose daughter is almost as old as you are. Have you had your tea? No more have I. Come, and we will propitiate the strictest sect of the Sadducees by ringing the bell and asking Mrs. Chard to bring it to us in person."

"After all, I don't see how even Arthur could think anyone could criticize me," she agreed and passed through the door he held open for her, adding with a gay frankness that charmed him, "in the circumstances."

"You see," she smiled with a touch of roguishness, when Mrs. Chard had come, marshaling Molly with the tray, had beamed upon them and departed, and they sat in the firelight and the fragrant emanations of the teapot, "your *Tristram* frightened Arthur — frightened him for me, of course, I mean, poor boy! He 's afraid of nothing for himself. But he had never read *Tristram* before. I had, — oh, years ago, — though I had not happened to mention it to him. And I was afraid Mrs. Chard might be shocked if I told her so when she offered it to me."

Sterne was pleased out of all measure. If instead of admiring his book, as it was clear that she did, she had attacked it, he would still have delighted in her honest courage. When she left, needless to say, she carried with her the copy of the *Sentimental Journey*,

of which two other women had now been disappointed; and he saw, not prudishness, but a wise discretion in her making Mrs. Chard's arrival for the tea things the signal for her departure.

"Your sex is so free," she said, rising from her chair with well-dissimulated difficulty and offering him her hand, "I wonder whether you can understand what a simple thing like having tea here with you can mean to a lonely girl."

"My dear madam," he smiled back at her over their clasped hands, "as I am not participating in that freedom at present, I believe I am more your debtor than you are mine. If I could but believe that the entertainment has been such as to make you desire a repetition of it — I shall be here at this hour for several days to come, unless this cold of mine is different from a hundred others I have known. May I do myself the honor of hoping that you will drink your tea with me to-morrow?"

"Ah, if I but knew whether you mean that or are only trying to be civil," she parried. "Mrs. Chard, — you have known Mr. Sterne for so long, — is he merely being polite to a green country girl, think you, or does he truly find my company agreeable?"

"Why, dearie, — that 's to say, — I believe Mr. Arthur would think it would do you good, madam," Mrs. Chard replied, answering first the girl's clear implication. "Mr. Sterne would never be polite at the expense of the truth. Of that I'm sure, and him a clergyman and all."

"Then I'll come," the girl nodded. "No. You shall not bow me out, sir. This air is frigid."

The closing door hid her gallant smile.

So began what proved to be his pleasantest hours for the next few days. True, so soon as it became known that he was confined to his rooms, friends and admirers poured in as of old: the whole of every morning the knocker was never still. They brought the best of news: old Horace Walpole, whose boast it had been that he could not get through three volumes of "tiresome *Tristram Shandy*," had confessed to reading the *Sentimental Journey* with pleasure; Thomas Gray, in his fastidious retirement at serious Cambridge, was said to be praising it; it was too soon for the reviews, but it was already a certainty that even the hostile *Monthly* would have to be sparing of censure. But fine as all this was, Sterne's spirits did not respond to it with their former resilience. He could galvanize them into a semblance of their old-time vivacity for the occasion and send his callers away to spread the mirth of one of his wild sallies through a score of withdrawing rooms before night. By lying late in bed and returning to it immediately after tea he could keep up the pretense, even to himself, that his influenza was a light attack this time. But the talk and laughter wearied him, and there were moments when the many voices and changing personalities came near reducing him to confusion. More and more he counted the minutes until he should be left alone to sit before his fire and taste in anticipation the hour of quiet converse

with the gaily intrepid girl who faced her future with such confident resolution. As day followed day, it was nothing else that kept him from closing his door and accepting the lot of the sick man he was rapidly becoming. He found her opinion of the *Sentimental Journey* more stimulating than those of all the wits and critics of the kingdom.

"And what I liked best in it," she ended her praise: "there was none of the cruelty in it that slipped into *Tristram*."

"Cruelty?" he echoed in astonishment. "My dear child! You might have called *Tristram* dirty, indecorous, dull — but cruel! I am humane to squeamishness, to a fault. Uncle Toby with the fly was no more idiotic than I am."

"When the chance to make a jest does n't cause you to forget. I said that the cruelty in *Tristram* had slipped in. Ah, just think of that poor woman suffering upstairs, and those men below, discussing this, that, and the other thing, listening to Trim's sermon and Uncle Toby's definition of the difference between a ravelin and a half-moon, and that sad trick of forcing Dr. Slop to read that dreadful excommunication! It was heartless, I thought, though I knew you had n't meant it so."

"My dear young lady, what would you have a husband do in such circumstances?" he began to defend himself warmly. "He sits below, helpless, while the loved one above pays for both — Mr. Shandy and my Uncle Toby did each promise Obadiah a crown if he made good speed for Dr.

Slop's green baize bag, remember," he broke off lest he should bring her coming trial too vividly to her mind, and then could have bitten his tongue with vexation that the allusion to the doctor's "instruments of salvation and deliverance" had escaped him.

But, if it touched her, she gave no sign, unless it were the tightening of the slender fingers interlocked about her knee, and the fact that before she spoke again he had time to consider what a charming picture she made, with her bright eyes, her pallor gone in the glow of the firelight, one slender foot on the fender, revealing perhaps six inches of smooth grey silk stocking. Her ankles were exquisite. Then she said she supposed an author must always slight certain elements in any situation in order to keep the whole in the desired key, and he was ready to go on his knees to her with pleasure and admiration at her perspicacity. Harsher criticism would be worth enduring for such amends; and, hoping she might have still another rod in pickle for him, he spoke of his ridicule of Dr. Slop.

"The ridiculous doctor was a better man than you seem to have understood, I think," she told him. "Remember how foul you said the roads were that night, and yet he rode down to Shandy Hall, uncalled, on the mere chance of being helpful. Have you ever given him credit for that?"

The discovery that her name, like his daughter's, was Lydia seemed to ratify the paternal-filial character of the relation that swiftly established itself

between them. He began to draw a kind of satisfaction even from the sound of her footfalls in the passage outside his door, for since the streets had become so dangerous she took her exercise there of afternoons. The necessity of this precaution was proved by Mrs. Chard, who slipped on her way home from her Saturday marketing, fell, and broke her ankle. Unasked, she had continued to give the sanction of her presence to the beginning of each of their little feasts, and her enforced absence increased their feeling of quiet intimacy.

In these what Sterne enjoyed most of all, perhaps, were the long minutes of silence that fell between him and the young wife as they grew to know each other. At such times all her faculties seemed to him to be turned inward, as it were, absorbed in the mysterious business of creation. The brooding calm of fecundity filled the room, as he had known it to fill a fertile countryside on a warm, breathless morning in late spring. Contrasted with his own state of wasting away, now fast, now slow, it might be, but always diminishing in body and strength, the thought of the new life, growing steadily toward light and beauty, soothed and comforted him. But he loved their talk. Little by little he heard of her motherless childhood in the flint-walled house on the wind-washed down above Brighthelmstone, the Roman camp crowning the crest of Ditchling Beacon behind it, and in front the sea, a flashing shield of azure all the long summer's day; of soft autumn mornings when she followed the harriers on her piebald pony;

and of winter afternoons, ranging her father's bookshelves unchecked, while the rain swirled and volleyed against the windows. He matched these things with carefully selected memories of the little boy with a sutler's daughter for mother, who followed his father's regiment from station to station over Ireland and England until a duel about a goose put an end to the family's connection with the army. They discussed what kind of childhood was best for a boy whose father had to follow the colors of his regiment.

"But of course you think, like Mr. Shandy, that a boy's name is the most important thing, next to the length of his nose," she sparkled suddenly. "'How many a luckless wight has been nicodemused into nonentity!' That may not be quite in your words, but 't is very near."

The subtle flattery of the quotation pleased him out of measure, but her flash of gaiety still more. She had come in that afternoon, depressed, neither stimulated nor refreshed by her exercise, the traces of tears on her mottled cheeks, and as unable to shake off her melancholy as he in his weariness was powerless to help her to do so. But now he was quick to follow her lead.

"You have decided that important point long ago, I suppose."

"The nose?"

"No. The name."

"Yes. It has been decided. But life is such a stupidly cruel thing!" she protested. "'T is the only thing we ever quarreled about, really, Arthur

and I. And just the day his orders came, so there was no time to make it up. If I could only have guessed that he had been serious about it before — And to-day comes a letter brought back by the pilot. He asks my forgiveness so sweetly, though I was the one who grew angry about it; I did so want Arthur — then Charles next, for my own father, but I could have been happy to have it Oliver after his."

She drew a letter from her breast and glanced it through, and by the candlelight Sterne could see the tear splotches that blurred the large angular writing.

"'T is a sweet letter," she said, looking up with moist eyes. "If I could only tell him that I am sorry, that of course a father ought to choose the name of his first son."

"He sticks to his choice?"

"I should be sorry now if he had not, although his father will not be pleased, and mine will laugh and swear when he hears it — Micah, Mr. Sterne!" Then, before he could recover, she had flashed a smile through her tears. "Could a boy be micahed into nonentity, sir? You have studied these matters."

She left him on that note, and he never saw her again, as things turned out. For next afternoon he harkened in vain for her steps in the corridor. Instead there came a scurry upstairs and down in the early darkness of a stormy nightfall, and Molly, an hour late with his tea, excused herself by explaining, wide-eyed and breathless, that she had had to run for the midwife.

The rain beat upon the windows, and the room

was full of chilling eddies that even whirled the ashes on the hearth, though he drew every curtain close and heaped the grate with sputtering coal. Yet he continued to sit in his chair, a portfolio in his lap, turning over and over the prints which it contained. To himself he pretended that he was comparing these, George Selwyn's recent gift, with his set of the sculptures on the tomb of Ovid, and deciding where they should hang in his dining room and study at Coxwold. But his eyes were seldom focused upon them. His ears strained to catch between the howlings of the gale any groan or cry from the room above. At length, as the time wore on toward midnight, he must have slept through sheer weariness, for a wild knocking on his door brought him to confused consciousness.

Molly the maid answered his summons to enter — a frightened, weeping Molly, who told him poor Mrs. Pym was dying, would die, that is, — the midwife owning herself beaten, — if Dr. Manningham were not fetched at once. And who was to fetch him, since she, Molly, alone could go, and for her life she dare not — not through the streets in this night and storm?

III

"Trust me, dear Yorick, this unwary pleasantry of thine will sooner or later bring thee into scrapes and difficulties, which no after-wit can extricate thee out of."

Tristram Shandy.

As he stepped into the street, the storm struck him with such violence that he fell back involuntarily to the shelter of the shallow porch. In anticipation of its fury his wretched body had cowered and shrunk while he made his brief preparations, but his generous impulse had preoccupied him, so that for the instant he was taken by surprise, routed. Either he was much weaker than he had supposed or the storm was one of the worst. With his back against the door, the very desperateness of the situation steadied him. The errand might cost him his life, but there was no one else to do it: the apprentice girl did not sleep in; and when he had tried persuasion and the promise of money, poor Molly had turned dumb with terror of the storm-swept midnight streets and shame at her own cowardice. The choice had become inevitable: either he ran the risk or his sweet young friend died by torment. A brief interview with the midwife had made that as clear as the woman's state of panic would permit.

Well, better men than he had lost their lives for worse causes. Why, the hazard was one for two! He had forgotten the baby's life completely until that moment. And, after all, was the risk to himself so very great? Serious illnesses in the past had been inexplicable visitations more often than the recognizable penalties of imprudence. That Sunday morning last year, for instance, when he had ploughed knee-deep through the snow to the King's levee and afterward to church, out of mere wanton desire for entertainment — Nature had never made him pay for it.

Thus, with a grounded courage, he set his face once more against the storm. Immediately all his powers were absorbed in the difficult business of getting forward. The driving rain blinded him; at every alley and corner the gale tore at his garments, clutched his hat, once all but succeeded in beating his slight form to the ground. Only by the utmost attention could he keep his feet on the glazed surface of worn paving stones and the undulating brick footways. The point of his stout stick slipped away beneath his weight, and he slid on his heels in danger of a fractured skull. Nor were these the only terrors. A sodden bundle of rags rose suddenly in his path, clung to his arm with hands that felt like skeleton claws, and kept pace with him, pouring out a flood of importunities and the fumes of stale gin, until he was forced to halt and drive it off with blows. Then it sank, a limp heap on the pavement again, and wept. And once, in the darkness between two

of the widely separated street-lamps that flared and tossed on their ropes in the gale, a burly form leaped at him from a doorway with upraised cudgel, but, miscalculating the distance, slipped, thudded headlong on the stones behind him, and lay still.

Not a glimmer showed in the windows of Dr. Manningham's house when, after painful minutes spent in deciphering the number, he began his bombardment of the knocker. Clinging with one hand to one of the rings for link-boys' torches, which was set in the masonry beside the door, he had belabored the panels with his stick for some minutes before a window opened above and Dr. Manningham thrust out his nightcapped head to shout that he would go nowhere in such weather.

It was not enough that Sterne, at the risk of a coughing fit in that savage air, shouted back a reminder of the doctor's promise to attend Mrs. Arthur Pym at need. With a scepticism born of his reluctance to go out, the doctor insisted on being satisfied of the identity of the messenger as a guaranty of the genuineness of the summons. Thereupon came such a change in his manner that it could be felt across the stormy space that separated the two men. His loud anger and suspicion gave place to a civility the most extraordinarily dry. A short two minutes later, in slippers and a dressing-gown that swirled about bare elephantine calves, he "did himself the honor" — if one could believe his words — to usher the Reverend Mr. Sterne, might he say the famous Mr. Sterne? into his poor surgery, where

he hoped so courted an author would not mind waiting while a poor devil of a man-midwife got into his clothes and snatched up his green baize bag.

"What did I ever do to this fellow?" thought Sterne, chilled to the vitals, half fainting with fatigue and bewildered by the man's sneering hostility. Not until the comparative warmth of the surgery began to penetrate his members did the irony of the situation dawn upon him: that he, the creator of Dr. Slop, the satirist of Dr. Burton and, through him, of the whole new science of obstetrics, should have been chosen by fate to struggle through storm and night at the risk of his life in quest of one of its most distinguished practitioners! His wry smile marked his appreciation of his predicament. No wonder if Dr. Manningham wrung out of it the last drop of vengeance which sarcasm could extract! He braced himself for the encounter as the physician's heavy step sounded on the stairs.

"I can hardly support such honor," the latter began the moment his great bulk blocked the doorway. "To be summoned by Parson Yorick in person! Mr. Shandy, if I recall correctly, contented himself with sending his serving-man for my distinguished Yorkshire confrère, the now celebrated bungler, Dr. Slop."

"Believe me, sir, your recollection of the episode makes the honors more than equal between us," Sterne replied suavely. The experience of a lifetime had taught him long ago that a soft answer, besides being the most Christian, is the most difficult for an

adversary to deal with. "In point of fact, Mr. Shandy behaved far less admirably throughout than the world in general appears to be aware of."

"Or his creator either, I would have hazarded till this moment." Dr. Manningham, who had begun to rummage in a cabinet full of gleaming instruments, turned to fix a shrewd glance upon his caller.

"On the other hand, Dr. Slop's professional devotion in coming uncalled seems to have escaped —"

Outwardly unruffled, the personification of calm urbanity despite his drenched and steaming garments, Sterne was going on to steal a leaf out of Mrs. Pym's comment, but the doctor broke in sharply: —

"A most unprofessional proceeding, sir — most unprofessional, upon my word, Mr. Sterne!"

"Indeed? I should have counted the action admirable, especially with the ways so foul as they were that night. It only shows what blunders we poor scribblers make when we assay an unfamiliar subject."

"It does n't half begin to show it, sir," the doctor snorted; then with a quick return to his sneering courtesy, "But had young Mrs. Pym told me she was the daughter of the distinguished Mr. Sterne —"

"Your pardon, sir," Sterne interrupted him. "But the young lady is no relation of mine. Lodgers in the same house, we met only a few days ago. I owe the pleasure of this meeting simply to the circumstance that —"

He was half turned toward the fire as he spoke, his thin hands held to the flames, so that the gust

which the gale flung down the chimney drove smoke and ashes into his unwary face. Involuntarily he gasped a mouthful, choked, strangled, and was forced to cling to the chimneypiece while the coughing fit racked him. Long before it was over the doctor had come to his side, sustaining the shaken form against his own billowing front.

"What do you mean, man, by coming out on such a night with a cough like that?" he demanded, when at length Sterne with set lips and heaving chest smiled at him apologetically out of watery eyes. "Don't you know you have taken your life in your hands?"

Sterne drew a careful breath. Then his lips smiled also.

"I have had this cough too long to take it quite so seriously, Dr. Manningham. There was no one else to fetch you, as it happened. It strikes me now, moreover, in view of what you have been saying, that there may be a not improper quality of expiation about it," he added with disarming candor.

"A totally improper quality of foolhardiness about it," the doctor retorted, struggling into his greatcoat and snatching up his hat and bag. "As a medical man, it would be my duty to go out to-night simply to see that you get home and are put to bed with the proper restoratives, if for nothing else. If I had a fever and a pulse like yours — Let us be gone, sir." He puffed out the candles and stamped into the vestibule, leaving Sterne to grope after him as best he could.

Of the long minutes before they stood indoors

again Sterne never recalled more than the strength of the doctor's right arm beneath his own left, guiding, supporting, fairly swinging him forward often, as his feet slipped and stumbled — that and the low rhythmical clink of the instruments that swung in their green baize bag from the doctor's shoulder. Thus they climbed to Sterne's sitting room, where the doctor took off his greatcoat before going up to his patient, giving Sterne gruff orders the while to get instantly to bed. But Sterne was not half undressed when he came down again, cursing under his breath.

"False — false as moonshine!" he growled, both his big white hands uplifted, in answer to Sterne's look of astonishment. "It may be days — a week even."

"But she was in agony."

"Quite likely. She is n't now, however. Such things are common enough. The midwife should have known, except that, like all her bungling sisterhood, she is so ignorant that she ought to be jailed as a dangerous quack. And 't is you and your likes, sir, that keep them out of jail, if you want to know. Now let's have a look at your sorry carcass." He laid hands of amazing strength on Sterne's frail shoulders. "If I cannot bring a new life into the world to-night, perhaps I can make it a little more certain that an old one shall not try to get out of it."

While his big, deft fingers went here and there, felt and probed, while he thumped and listened and

peered through thick spectacles, he never ceased to speak.

"Do you realize that those instruments which so moved you to mockery are humble attempts to reproduce similar inventions of the Romans, sir, lost, like so much else, or trodden into the mud of superstition by your precious religion? Now, say 'ninety-nine,' if you please. Repeat it. Enough. Do you realize that poor Burton, whom you turned into a laughingstock with your Dr. Slop, is a gallant pioneer — Say 'ah,' if you please — or do you resent any attempt to improve matters which have been a burning shame to mankind since the days of Abraham, because some old moth-eaten rabbi with indigestion wrote, 'In sorrow shalt thou bring forth children,' putting the blame on God for something man was too stupid to remedy? Has your wife borne you children, man?"

He paused in stirring a draught of medicine and fixed Sterne with a compelling eye.

"Two? Difficult affairs? I thought as much. A sorry revenge you took for your fear and anxiety, making the whole business, the love that goes before it, the desperate efforts to alleviate the suffering, the subject of a lampoon for fools to snigger at! Don't answer me; save your strength. You 've need of every ounce of it. Send for your physician, mind, the first thing in the morning." He tucked the covers around Sterne's neck and blew out the bedroom candle. "No. No thanks *and* no fee. Neither is due," he broke in on Sterne's somewhat perfunctory expression of gratitude. "You have

done an act of common humanity to-night; so have I — nothing more."

"Do one other, then," begged Sterne, not to be altogether put down. "Pray do not tell Mrs. Pym 't was I that fetched you. 'T would be a pity to add to her concern, if I should have to pay something for my poor effort to be of service to her."

"Rest assured I do not forget the mental aspect of my cases, Mr. Sterne," the doctor snubbed him. "Pray tell your medical man the circumstances in which I was led to presume to attend you, sir. There is a kind of honor even among us Slops, you see."

Exhausted as he was, Sterne slept almost before the doctor was out of the room, but a vague sense of humiliation haunted the half-waking moments when he turned in pain and discomfort during the night. He woke with a burning consciousness of outrage. He had no need of his physician's emphatic order to confine him to his bed, nor of that grave man's word for it that his old enemy pleurisy had its claws in his breast again. He knew he was very ill. But the fact preoccupied him, who had been down to death's door and back so often, less than the memory of the degradation of which he had been made a victim the night before. He had been bruised in spirit, flogged, spat upon. The cold, skilled, impersonal manipulations of Manningham, as destitute of all humanity and feeling as if their subject had been the most repulsive inmate of the lazar house, added to the humiliation of the experience. He thought of penitents

whom he had seen, sentenced to stand in sheets before the great door of York Cathedral, and his half-propitiatory, wholly jesting remark about his dangerous errand being an expiation stabbed through his mind. It had been an expiation indeed! Manningham had seen to that.

He had never been a humble man nor patient of assailants, but he had striven to be a just one. Yet, false and stupid or mere fabrication as he felt the greater part of the angry doctor's accusations to be, he had not been able to answer them. Manningham had caught him when mental and bodily strength were lowest, and left him without a shred of self-justification to cover his shame. But he could not answer them now, though his sick brain repeated them again and again. Had he then made a jest of beautiful things, of pitiful, gallant things made holy by suffering? Had he indeed lampooned the sacred eternal mysteries?

Ah, but he had not! What he had done was to call forth whole-hearted laughter at men and women who so mishandled those things that they became mere travesties of what they were. Thus his reason reassured him, when in a blessed dropping of his fever on the second morning he rallied his faculties to drive off his enemy for good and all. He had poked fun at the Shandys, man and wife, for turning what should have been a glowing sacrament into a household duty less important than the winding of the clock. He had showed a solemn posturer for the mere bungling, inept enthusiast that he was. At

the least he had let a flood of laughter into a close room where prudery would keep hidden a swarm of abominations.

Why, the whole world had laughed: England, France, Germany even, and the colonies beyond the sea, all — all but the solemn fools and the hypocrites and this touchy pachyderm who could not bear to see his pet branch of his profession get a gibe. All had laughed but such as these — and young, sweet, intelligent Mrs. Pym. Upon her honest characterization of the satire as cruel — and she had meant so much more than her gentleness would let her say — the whole fabric of his defense came to wreck, build it up again and again though he might, as he did with desperate haste while his fever mounted.

He strove to drive the subject from his mind with other thoughts, but all led back to it. He saw his life a waste behind him, sparsely strewn with the many little volumes of the novel in which he had taken so much pride and joy, and which he now perceived to be no more than so many clever jest-books. The continual thudding of the knocker on the street door below, a sound which last year had given him so much pleasure as testimony of his continuing importance in the life of the metropolis, where to sink out of sight was to be forgotten, only made him wonder if every one of those kind inquirers saw and had always seen his shallowness. And he remembered suddenly that he himself had had no higher opinion of his fame than to believe that a woman like Lady Percy might have the first intimation of its eclipse.

He nerved himself to write to his daughter. To her happy account of the reception of the *Sentimental Journey* at York he could reply with the good news of it in London. But for the first time out of a hundred when danger and the fear of death had perched upon his wasted shoulders, those two dreadful presences found expression in his written words.

"The want of health bows me down," he wrote, "and vanity harbors not in thy father's breast — this vile influenza — be not alarmed, I think I shall get the better of it and shall be with you both the first of May, and if I escape 't will not be for a long period, my dear child — unless a quiet retreat and peace of mind can restore me. . . ."

What would become of his dear Lydia when his provision should be withdrawn? Kind friends? The Jameses? "God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb"? Yes. No doubt kind friends would do as they had always done. If he had money for his needs at that moment, it was because friends had never pressed him for payment of innumerable loans, each inconsiderable but in their aggregate a staggering sum. Complacent acquaintances had thought their jester worth what he cost them, no doubt!

He began to welcome the increasing severity of his sick-room routine, the more frequent dosings, the bleedings, and blisterings. The constant fight against pain and discomfort, his cold feet, his weary back and encrusted lips, made it harder for the thought of other things to get possession of him. Time ceased to be marked by the succession of day and night so

much as by these episodes, and he wondered dully how many days he had lain in bed when a little note from Mrs. Pym was put into his hands. Had her child been born, and he not told of it? He fumbled with its folds, then eagerly handed it to the nurse to open for him.

It was a gay little missive. She had had another letter from her husband — a vessel which had passed the transport off Plymouth had brought it — and the baby was to be called Oliver, after all. Arthur had seen wisdom, and not too late. Oliver Pym! What would Mr. Shandy have said to that? "A sniveling, crop-eared Roundhead of a name," would be her father's comment. He would swear under his breath, but since it was the name of the baby's other grandfather, he could not well complain. And Arthur, when he called the child in years to come, could pleasure himself by thinking of the dour Cromwell, as stiff a prophet in his way as Micah had ever been in his, while she would think of Oliver, Roland's friend, the paladin, and of all gallant and graceful fantasies. Would Mr. Sterne — dear Mr. Sterne she thought she might dare to call him after all his kindness — stand proxy for one of the child's godfathers when the time came? It began to seem now as if it would be hardly necessary to delay the christening to make it coincide with his recovery.

"After all this pother about names," she ended, "how you will smile at me, if it prove to be a girl!"

He read the note again and yet again. He seemed to draw from it a sense of peace, the peace of courage

and quiet confidence, the restfulness which had come upon him in their long silences together before his fire. Puzzled for a moment, he wondered why he had thought so little about her and her expectations of late. Then he remembered. He had not dared to, lest by that way he should be led back to be hag-ridden by the sense of his futility. Even his effort to help her had been needless, useless. But after reading her note he no longer saw himself the mock-heroic dupe he had seemed until then in that action. By grace of what she had written, his attempt to be of service to her seemed to give him a certain right of interest in the new life that was pausing on the threshold of existence. It made him in a humble way a participant in the brave business of bringing it forth; and with a recovered manliness he could put his sufferings for past failures behind him in quiet scorn. The sound of footsteps overhead caught his ear. He listened intently until they ceased, assuring him that they had no special significance.

He heard the doctor tell him that he was better that afternoon. After an interval that might have been a night and half another day, Mr. James came, full of the kindest assurances and plans for his dear Lydia in case of need. Later — how much later he never knew — Mrs. Chard appeared, hobbling on a crutch, and when he protested against her climbing the stairs in her crippled state, came over to the bed and silently squeezed his hand. He meant to ask her if there were any news of Mrs. Pym; but just then footsteps sounded above once more, and by the

time they ceased she had moved away and a nurse was beside him, insisting that something or other had to be done. Then he had fallen asleep, he believed. Otherwise his first intimation of happenings upstairs would not have been a scurry of feet in the passage. He was very sleepy still. Only by the greatest effort could he keep his attention fixed. At last a heavy, measured tread that could be none other than Dr. Manningham's climbed the stairs, died away on the upper flight, and thudded on the floor above him.

The afternoon wore away. At times he drowsed in spite of his expectancy, and his dreams mixed himself up with old Simeon in the Temple, and another child, and at the same time he seemed to be in his stall in York choir, joining with the choristers in the chant at evensong and annoyed that they were so perfunctory about it.

"Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace: according to thy word."

What did they mean by droning it like that? Did n't they know it was an old man's song of rejoicing and liberation, not a dirge? He must speak to the Precentor about it — only he could n't very well, since the Precentor was his Uncle Jaques and they were not on speaking terms. Besides, Uncle Jaques was dead — had been dead a long while, had n't he?

The opening of his door and a whispered colloquy awoke him. There were sounds above also: rapid, strenuous movements that shook the ceiling. He realized that he felt very strange, not in pain exactly,

but in a state so new and alarming that he had to command himself in order to keep his attention on what was to be heard from overhead. What with the whispering at his door he would lose half of it at best. The nurse was gossiping with some young man or other, to judge by what he could make out through the wintry twilight that filled the room. Both turned toward him as they spoke, and he threw up one hand in a sharp gesture to command their silence.

His errand done, the young man returned to those who had sent him. At Sir James Gray's house in Clifford Street he found dinner just over, the gentlemen at their wine. The Duke of Roxburgh, the Earl of March, the Earl of Upper-Ossory, the Duke of Grafton, Mr. Garrick, Mr. Hume, and Mr. James, all friends of Sterne, they had begged their host, John Crauford of Errol, to send to ask how he did. The young man, the cadet of a ruined Highland family, told his tale with a Scottish regard for exactitude.

"You say," Mr. James questioned him when he had done, "You say, Mr. Macdonald, that he said 'Now it is come,' and died in a minute. Were those his last words?"

"To the best of my knowledge and belief, sir," the young man replied. "But there was a babe just born on the floor above, and what with its lusty howling and the doors all open, — for the lady sent the maid running down to tell Mr. Sterne 't was a boy, — 't is just possible I might have missed a word, though I do not think it."

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Bill, Alfred Hoyt, 1879-
Alas, poor Yorick!

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